

Improving Response to the American Community Survey (ACS)

**For
National Academies
Workshop on Respondent Burden in the
American Community Survey
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By

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Some background

- I want to congratulate the Census Bureau on the multiple 2015 tests that I learned about last week; they are well done.
- I also believe more can be done to improve ACS self-administered response rates, and this is the focus of my comments.

Important Background: Why do people respond to Census self-administered surveys

(Dillman, 2000, Mail and Internet Surveys, pp.298-313)

- In the 1990's 16 factors were tested experimentally in an effort to improve mail-back response rates to Decennial Census forms.
- Only five of these factors significantly improved response rates.
 1. **Respondent-friendly visual design**
 2. **Pre-notice letter**
 3. **Postcard thank-you reminder**
 4. **Replacement questionnaire**
 5. **Prominent disclosure on envelope (U.S. Census Form Enclosed: Your Response is required by law)**
- Findings on the first four techniques were consistent with non-Census research. The “required by law” effect was Census-specific (and came from business survey research).
- Multiple contacts produced biggest effect, ~58%. The mandatory response notice added only modestly (9 percentage points) to this amount in non-census year tests.

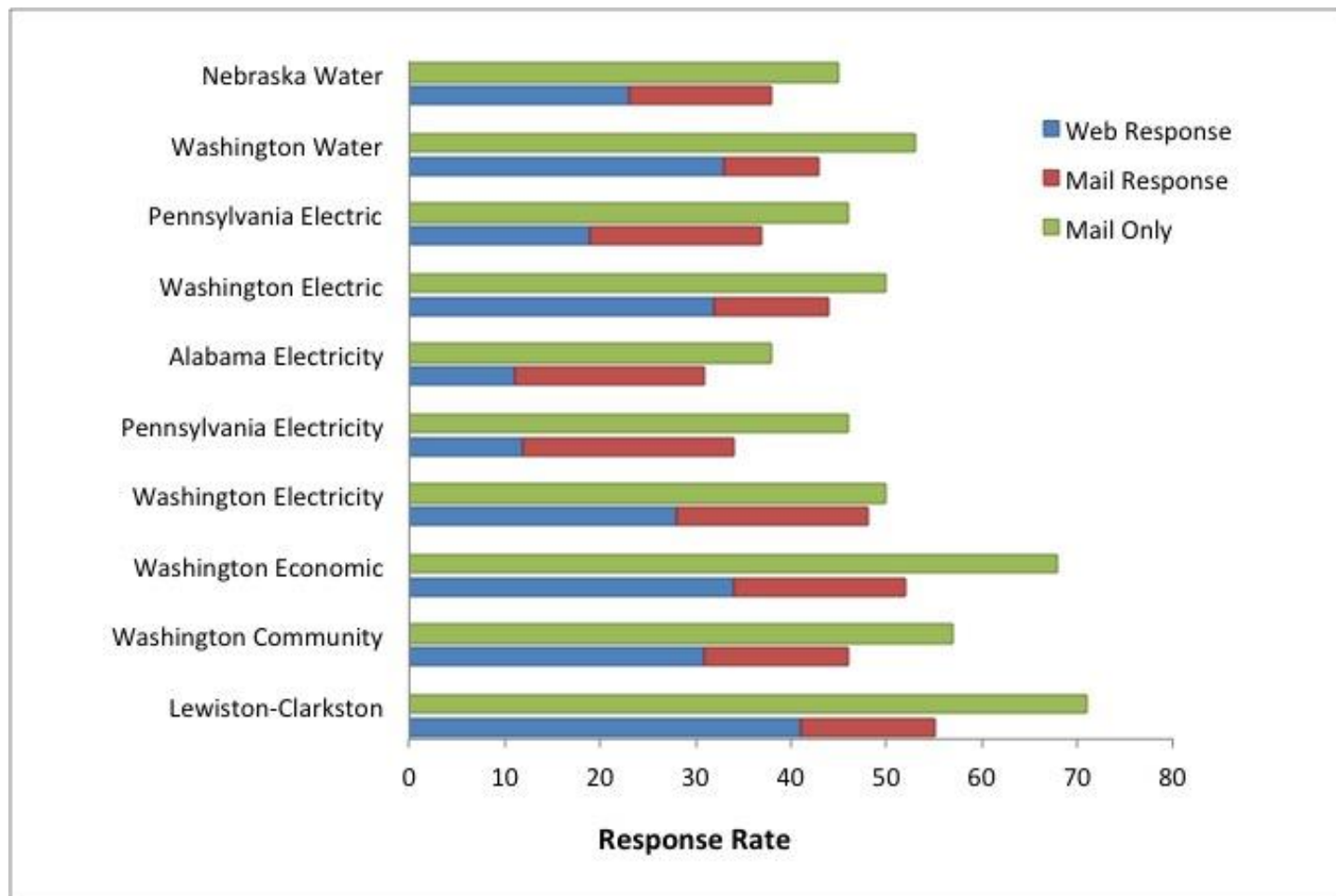
Where the “response process” breaks down

- A 1991 survey showed some people did not respond to 1990 Decennial Census because:
 - They did not remember receiving the Census form.
 - They received it, but did not open it.
 - They opened it, but did not start to fill it out.
 - They started to fill it out but did not finish.
 - They completed the form, but did not send it back.
- The strength of multiple contacts is that each is an opportunity to get people to start and/or finish responding, but each contact needs to 1) be seen, 2) be processed and 3) add value.

Sponsorship and the “web-push” challenge

- Census Bureau “government” sponsorship is probably the most desirable sponsorship possible for obtaining high response rates. Census Bureau has credibility that other organizations and agencies lack.
- Obtaining response to a web-push methodology (request web response, and offer mail later) is more difficult than getting responses to only a mail-out mail-back procedure.
 - Research evidence: Ten University sponsored tests in multiple states produced mean response rates of 43% for a web-push methodology vs. 53% for a mail-out, mail-back approach.
 - The reason for lower response is that switching from one medium of communication (mail contact) to web response. requires special effort.

Response rates for 10 statewide web-push (mean, 43%, with 62% over the web) vs. mail out/mail back (mean, 53%) surveys, 2007-2012 (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014, Chapter 11).



What makes a communication sequence effective?

- Designing all visible aspects of mail contacts in mutually supportive ways.
 - Outside appearance of envelope or card—size, shape, print.
 - The message (letter) requesting a response.
 - Enclosures.
 - The Census form cover pages.
 - The actual questions.
- Factors that work against individual effectiveness of contacts
 - Keeping the same outside appearance of most mailings.
 - Repeating the same content over and over so new information and appeals
 - cannot be added.
 - Gratuitous enclosures that are not relevant to most people who will respond.
 - Failure to convey the importance of each household's response.
 - Failure to utilize new opportunities/places for effective persuasion in later contacts.
- Goal is to avoid sameness of arguments and letting each contact become unfocused (too many disparate enclosures).

The current implementation package has five contacts

- 1 a. envelope, b. frequently asked questions, c. instruction card for logging in, d. multi-language brochure, e. message from the director.
- 2 a. envelope, b. message from the director.
- 3 a. envelope, b. frequently asked questions (repeat), c. 16 page Instruction booklet, d. card for log-in, e. message from the director, f. paper questionnaire, g. return envelope.
4. Reminder postcard (small).
5. Large postcard


I propose removing or change certain these elements in the five Census contacts

- 1 a. envelope, b. ~~frequently asked questions~~,
c. ~~instruction card for logging in~~, d. ~~multi-language brochure~~, e. message from the director. ADD: **How your responses help America.**
- 2 a. envelope, b. message from the director.
- 3 a. envelope, b. ~~frequently asked questions (repeat)~~, c. ~~16 page instruction booklet~~, d. ~~card for log in~~, e. message from the director, f. paper questionnaire, g. return envelope. ADD: **How your responses help America**
4. Small reminder postcard.
5. ~~Large postcard~~ Replace with letter

Contact 1. Remove elements that interfere with focus and add “How Your Responses Help America”

- Change, “American Community Survey” to “U.S. Census Form is Enclosed” to get envelope opened.
- Remove language enclosure from mailing. English and Spanish sections are wrong (“In a few days you will receive an American Community Survey...”) and this efforts needs to be integrated into letter.)
- Remove Frequently Asked Questions brochure. It’s partially redundant and points can be better conveyed in letter. Also, some parts, “ e.g. helping your community to establish goals...” is probably not credible to most people.
- Replace the two enclosures with “How Your Responses Help America”. It gives concrete examples of why the ACS is important.
- Eliminate web card and put log-in information into the letter
- **Rewrite letter** to make it culturally consistent with being a request to which the recipient is required to respond.

Envelope Less likely to be opened because ACS not well known; previously tested as U.S. Census form enclosed; Census Bureau deemphasized to lesser known entity, and seems to be located in Jeffersonville

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 1201 East 10th Street Jeffersonville IN 47132-0001	AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER	PRESORTED FIRST-CLASS MAIL POSTAGE & FEES PAID U.S. Census Bureau Permit No. G-58
OFFICIAL BUSINESS Penalty for Private Use \$300 ACS-46IM (2013) (12-2012)		
The American Community Survey YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUIRED BY LAW		
		

Frequently asked questions does not add much value; Graphics inconsistent with multi-language brochure.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey collects information about population and housing characteristics for the nation, states, counties, metropolitan areas, and nonmetropolitan areas. Based on the American Community Survey, the Census Bureau can provide up-to-date data about our rapidly changing country. More often than once every 10 years when the census is conducted.

How do I benefit from answering the American Community Survey?

Communities need data about the well-being of children, families, and the older population to provide services to them. By responding to the American Community Survey questionnaire, you are helping your community to establish goals, identify problems and solutions, and measure the performance of programs.

The data are also used to decide where to locate new highways, schools, hospitals, and community centers; to plan a large corporation that is to have the most effective employee needs; and to plan other ways.

Do I have to answer the questions on the American Community Survey?

Yes. Your response to this survey is required by law (Title 13, U.S. Code, Sections 141, 145, and 221). Title 13, as changed by Title 14, imposes a penalty for not responding. By completing this survey, you will also avoid 40 minutes in court.

How will the Census Bureau use the information that I provide?

The Census Bureau can use the information you provide for statistical purposes only and cannot publish or release information that would identify you or your household. Your information will be used in collaboration with information from other households to produce data for your community. Similar data will be produced for communities across the United States.

We may collect your answers with information that you give to other agencies to enhance the statistical use of those data. This information will be given the same protection 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.

Will the Census Bureau use my information confidentially?

Yes. All of the information that Census Bureau collects for this survey about you and your household is confidential by law (Title 13, U.S. Code, Section 14). By law, every Census Bureau official who is checking the Director as well as every field representative has taken an oath and is subject to a jail term, a fine, or both if he or she discloses ANY information that could identify you or your household.

Where can I find more information about the American Community Survey or get assistance?

You may visit our Web site census.gov/acs or call 1-800-354-7271 if you need assistance or have information.

Also Delete multi-language brochure. Can this be explained in the letter? Some wording now seems inaccurate.

The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting the American Community Survey. In a few days you will receive an American Community Survey questionnaire in the mail. Because you are living in the United States, you are required by law to respond to this survey. If you have question about the form, please call us toll-free at 1-800-354-7271.

What is the American Community Survey?
The American Community Survey is an important survey conducted by the Census Bureau. It is designed to give communities current information about its people and housing. In order to make well-informed decisions, a community needs accurate and reliable information. By responding to this survey, you are helping your community to get this kind of information.

Will my answers to this survey be kept confidential?

Yes. All of the information the Census Bureau collects for this survey about you and your household is confidential by law (Title 13, United States Code).

La Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos está realizando la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense. En unos días, recibirá por correo un cuestionario de la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense. Como usted está viviendo en los Estados Unidos, la ley exige que usted responda a esta encuesta. Si tiene preguntas sobre el cuestionario, llámenos al 1-877-833-5625 para hablar con uno de nuestros empleados que habla español. La llamada es gratis. El empleado podrá contestar la encuesta por teléfono.

¿Qué es la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense?

La Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense es una encuesta importante realizada por la Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos. Está diseñada para brindar información actual a las comunidades sobre las personas y las viviendas. Para poder tomar buenas decisiones, una comunidad necesita información precisa y confiable. Al responder a esta encuesta, usted está ayudando a su comunidad a obtener este tipo de información.

¿Serán confidenciales mis respuestas a esta encuesta?

Así es. Toda información que la Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos obtenga durante esta encuesta sobre usted y su vivienda es confidencial según la ley (Título 13, Código de los Estados Unidos).

Important Information From the U.S. Census Bureau

Información Importante de la Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos

美国人口普查局重要通知

Thông tin quan trọng từ Văn phòng Thống kê Dân số Hoa Kỳ

Важная информация от Бюро переписи населения США

미국 인구조사국에서 전해드리는 중요한 정보

Văn phòng Thống kê Dân số Hoa Kỳ đang thực hiện cuộc Khảo sát Cộng đồng tại Mỹ.
Trong một vài ngày nữa quý vị sẽ nhận được bản câu hỏi Khảo sát Cộng đồng tại Mỹ qua thư từ. Vì quý vị đang sống ở Hoa Kỳ, nên luật bắt buộc quý vị phải trả lời cuộc khảo sát này. Nếu quý vị có thắc mắc về mẫu đơn, xin gọi chúng tôi theo số điện thoại miễn phí 1-877-221-9438. Bản câu hỏi khảo sát chỉ có bằng tiếng Anh.

Cuộc Khảo sát Cộng đồng tại Mỹ là gì?
Cuộc Khảo sát Cộng đồng tại Mỹ là một cuộc khảo sát quan trọng được Văn phòng Thống kê Dân số Hoa Kỳ thực hiện. Nó được thiết kế để cung cấp cho cộng đồng thông tin hiện tại về người dân và nhà cửa. Nhằm có được những quyết định chính xác có lợi trực tiếp cho những nhu cầu của cộng đồng quý vị, những thông tin cần được chính xác và đáng tin cậy. Bằng cách trả lời cuộc khảo sát này, quý vị đang giúp cộng đồng mình Mỹ được loại thông tin này.

Lưu ý cho câu trả lời khảo sát của tôi có được giữ bí mật không?

Có. Tất cả thông tin mà Văn phòng Thống kê Dân số Hoa Kỳ thu thập cho cuộc khảo sát này về quý vị và người nhà đều được giữ bí mật theo luật. (Tiêu đề 13, Bộ Luật Hoa Kỳ).

Бюро переписи населения проводит Анкетирование населения США на месте жительства

«Вскоре несколько дней Вы получите на почте анкету Анкетирование населения США на месте жительства. Так как Вы проживаете в США, Вы обязаны и законны дать ответы на вопросы данной анкеты. Если у Вас возникли вопросы на английском языке, Позвоните по бесплатному номеру 1-866-225-2297, и Вы получите русскоязычный сотрудник. Вы сможете получить ответы на Ваши вопросы и Вы сможете заполнить анкету по телефону».

Что представляет собой Анкетирование населения США на месте жительства?

Анкетирование населения США на месте жительства – это регулярное исследование, проводимое Бюро переписи населения США. Его цель – обеспечить общество актуальной информацией о населении и жилищных условиях. Для проведения объективной оценки на местах необходимо иметь точную и достоверную информацию. Ответы на анкету являются основой исследования. Вы сможете помочь району получить такую информацию.

Будет ли сохранена конфиденциальность моих ответов?

Да. Согласно законодательству (Раздел 13, Кодекс законов США) вся информация о вас и вашем доме, собранная Бюро переписи населения США в рамках настоящего исследования, является конфиденциальной.

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会保密。根据法律的规定（美国法典第13章），对于这次问卷调查收集的有关您个人和住户的信息，人口普查局都必须保密。





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Replace with this much needed explanation for why the ACS is an important and mandatory survey.








How Your Responses Help America


The American Community Survey (ACS) provides vital information that public officials, planners, and entrepreneurs use to assess the past and plan the future. When you respond to the ACS, you are doing your part to help your community plan hospitals, support school lunch programs, improve emergency services, build bridges, and inform businesses looking to add jobs and expand to new markets, and more. Respond at <https://respond.census.gov/acs> or fill out the questionnaire today.

What we ask about...	How your responses help...
 Employment <p>The ACS asks whether respondents are employed, unemployed, and out of the labor force. It also asks about weeks and hours worked and about industry and occupation.</p>	<p>This information helps government at all levels better understand unemployment and the availability of workers, plan unemployment programs and services, and develop programs to boost employment. Communities learn which occupations and industries are growing in their areas and businesses can find locations with the workforce they need.</p>
 Education <p>The ACS asks about school enrollment, gathering information on America's students from nursery school to graduate school and on whether they are in a private or public school. It also asks about educational attainment—did the respondent earn a high school diploma or the equivalent, a bachelor's degree, or higher?</p>	<p>These statistics help communities to measure how well educational resources are serving their populations, measure changes in education over time, evaluate the educational attainment of the workforce, and identify the educational and training needs of adults. This information also helps communities to bridge gaps between the educational attainment of potential workers and the educational requirements of potential employers.</p>
 Veterans <p>The ACS asks about a person's military service, where veterans are moving throughout the country, their ages, and their VA service-connected disability rating status to understand veterans' needs at the community level. Though the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains veterans' records, the ACS provides additional statistics about all veterans, regardless of whether they utilize VA services.</p>	<p>These statistics about veterans help communities plan for future health care and nursing homes, plan and fund job training, and improve the home loan guarantee program. They also benefit businesses looking to hire or serve veterans.</p>
 Income and Housing Costs <p>The ACS asks several questions about the money you receive from various sources and your regular living expenses such as rents, mortgages, taxes, and utilities.</p>	<p>The statistics that result from these questions help gauge the need for economic and housing assistance. How many people live in poverty; what are their characteristics—the ACS is the only source of these data at the community level. Income and poverty estimates factor into funding requests that address need. When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs.</p>



Back side of How your responses help America

 <p>Commuting The ACS asks about your daily commute—where you go, how you get there, what time you leave for work, and how long it takes—to understand where people are traveling during a normal day.</p>	<p>Precise information about your commuting patterns is crucial to planning improvements to roads and highways, developing transportation services, and creating emergency response strategies.</p>
 <p>Disability and Health Insurance The ACS asks about a person's difficulty with specific daily living tasks: Do you have difficulty seeing or hearing? Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs or in dressing or bathing? The ACS also asks whether people have health insurance, including type of health insurance for those who have health coverage plans.</p>	<p>Communities use these statistics to plan services such as transportation, employment programs, and public service accessibility for people with disabilities. Businesses that serve this population may also seek areas that have a high demand for their services.</p> <p>From these statistics, we learn which groups are at risk of experiencing limited health care access, poor health, and poor health outcomes.</p>
 <p>Housing Characteristics The ACS asks questions about plumbing, kitchen facilities, and other housing features to help identify areas with substandard housing. Questions about the size and age of housing also flag local problems like overcrowding, health hazards, and congestion.</p>	<p>Through your ACS responses, we learn about communities eligible for housing assistance, rehabilitation loans, and other programs that help people afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing.</p> <p>Your responses help communities plan solutions. In places where disaster strikes, these data are vital in planning recovery.</p>
 <p>Owners and Renters The ACS asks about whether you own or rent your home, and the amount of monthly rent or how much the home and property are worth.</p>	<p>These statistics are used to analyze whether housing is affordable, protect owners and renters, and allocate and fund assistance programs. Governments use these statistics to understand changes in local housing markets, monitor affordability, qualify for assistance, and reduce the tax revenue losses from vacant or abandoned properties. Businesses use these data to design and market homes, and home goods.</p>
 <p>People and Relationships The ACS asks respondents about their age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and their relationship to others in the household.</p>	<p>This information, along with other statistics, is used to monitor well-being, discrimination, and economic hardship. Federal agencies use this information to administer programs providing funds and services for groups such as single parents, low-income families, older people living alone, etc. Businesses use these estimates to evaluate local market demand for products and services.</p>



U.S. Department of Commerce

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ACS-830 (8-2015)

Pump-up Relevance and Content of the cover letter, so it no longer appears mass-produced

- Replace the salutation “A message from the Director, U.S. Census Bureau”. With inside address (replacement for online card insert).
- Put date on the letter (culturally, targeted communications have dates).
- Add any essential information from removed brochures using backside of the letter if needed.
- Explain why people are required to respond and that the response applies to all persons living at this address.
- Tie justification of request to, **How your responses help America.**

Contact 2: Replace postcard with letter reminder (already done)

- This letter was tested and replaced pre-notice letter and reminder postcard after August 2015. (Reminder Postcard was a carryover from mail-only request. It could not provide name of survey and login information, so respondent was “pushed back” to first mail-out, thus increasing the “burden” of figuring out how to respond online.
- This change illustrates how web-push methods need different contacts than did a mail-only approach.
- Internet response improved ~5 %, total Internet + mail response ~3.5%.

Further Improvements?

- The new letter needs a number of text changes, but I could not develop those within today's time constraints.
- Replacing pre-notice and reminder card with a follow-up letter has potential cost savings is \$5-9 million.

Third Contact: Eliminate three of current enclosures

- Currently includes 7 pieces of paper.
 - a. envelope, ~~b. frequently asked questions,~~
~~c. 16 page instruction booklet,~~ d. ~~log in card,~~
e. message from the director, f. paper questionnaire, g. return envelope.
- Results of Census experiment. Removal of instruction booklet and choice card had no significant effect on item or unit response rate or calls for assistance.
- Cost savings for excluding both is ~2.7% of total cost.

Eliminate the 18 page instruction guide from Contact 3



Your Guide for

THE
**American
Community
Survey**

This guide gives helpful information on completing your survey form. If you need more help, call 1-800-354-7271. The telephone call is free. After you have completed your survey form, **please return it in the postage-paid envelope** we have provided.

- It is a holdover from 1990 Census that has changed little except for question specifics.
- It's inclusion does not improve response.
- A non significant improvement in item response could be helped by new form cover page
- This guide is not used with the online version of the ACS.

Web card can also be removed without negatively affecting response rates; shift content to the letter



American Community Survey

U.S. Department of Commerce | Economics and Statistics Administration

Two Ways to Complete the American Community Survey:



Option 1 – Go to <https://respond.census.gov/acs> to complete the survey online. **IMPORTANT:** You will need information from the address label on the enclosed questionnaire to log in.



Option 2 – Fill out the enclosed questionnaire and mail it back in the postage-paid envelope.

Please choose **ONLY** one way to respond. If you need help or have questions about the American Community Survey, call the toll-free number 1-800-354-7271.

Vea el otro lado para español.

ACS-34RM (04/04/2013)

Other changes for Contact 3 are needed

- Add: “How Your Responses Help America.”
 - Normally, repetition should be avoided. But, when changing modes of response, it is warranted if value is added.
- Redesign first page of the paper form to make it appealing, and communicate survey purpose.
- This mailing more likely than previous ones to be shared with other people in household; questionnaire cover gives more space for articulating why a response is important, in location that will do the most good.






Use as supporting enclosure for the newly drafted paper cover page

United States Census Bureau

How Your Responses Help America

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides vital information that public officials, planners, and entrepreneurs use to assess the past and plan the future. When you respond to the ACS, you are doing your part to help your community plan hospitals, support school lunch programs, improve emergency services, build bridges, and inform businesses looking to add jobs and expand to new markets, and more. Respond at <https://respond.census.gov/acs> or fill out the questionnaire today.

What we ask about...	How your responses help...
Employment  The ACS asks whether respondents are employed, unemployed, and out of the labor force. It also asks about weeks and hours worked and about industry and occupation.	This information helps government at all levels better understand unemployment and the availability of workers, plan unemployment programs and services, and develop programs to boost employment. Communities learn which occupations and industries are growing in their areas and businesses can find locations with the workforce they need.
Education  The ACS asks about school enrollment, gathering information on America's students from nursery school to graduate school and on whether they are in a private or public school. It also asks about educational attainment—did the respondent earn a high school diploma or the equivalent, a bachelor's degree, or higher?	These statistics help communities to measure how well educational resources are serving their populations, measure changes in education over time, evaluate the educational attainment of the workforce, and identify the educational and training needs of adults. This information also helps communities to bridge gaps between the educational attainment of potential workers and the educational requirements of potential employers.
Veterans  The ACS asks about a person's military service, where veterans are moving throughout the country, their ages, and their VA service-connected disability rating status to understand veterans' needs at the community level. Though the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains veterans' records, the ACS provides additional statistics about all veterans, regardless of whether they utilize VA services.	These statistics about veterans help communities plan for future health care and nursing homes, plan and fund job training, and improve the home loan guarantee program. They also benefit businesses looking to hire or serve veterans.
Income and Housing Costs  The ACS asks several questions about the money you receive from various sources and your regular living expenses such as rents, mortgages, taxes, and utilities.	The statistics that result from these questions help gauge the need for economic and housing assistance. How many people live in poverty, what are their characteristics—the ACS is the only source of these data at the community level. Income and poverty estimates factor into funding requests that address need. When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs.

 Commuting The ACS asks about your daily commute—where you go, how you get there, what time you leave for work, and how long it takes—to understand where people are traveling during a normal day.	Precise information about your commuting patterns is crucial to planning improvements to roads and highways, developing transportation and services, and creating emergency response strategies.
 Disability and Health Insurance The ACS asks about a person's difficulty with specific daily living tasks: Do you have difficulty seeing or hearing? Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs or in dressing or bathing? The ACS also asks whether people have health insurance, including type of health insurance for those who have health coverage plans.	Communities use these statistics to plan services such as transportation, employment programs, and public service accessibility for people with disabilities. Businesses that serve this population may also seek areas that have a high demand for their services. From these statistics, we learn which groups are at risk of experiencing limited health care access, poor health, and poor health outcomes.
 Housing Characteristics The ACS asks questions about plumbing, kitchen facilities, and other housing features to help identify areas with substandard housing. Questions about the size and age of housing also flag local problems like overcrowding, health hazards, and congestion.	Through your ACS responses, we learn about communities eligible for housing assistance, rehabilitation loans, and other programs that help people afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing. Your responses help communities plan solutions. In places where disaster strikes, these data are vital in planning recovery.
 Owners and Renters The ACS asks about whether you own or rent your home, and the amount of monthly rent or how much the home and property are worth.	These statistics are used to analyze whether housing is affordable, protect owners and renters, and allocate and fund assistance programs. Governments use these statistics to understand changes in local housing markets, monitor affordability, qualify for assistance, and reduce the tax revenue losses from vacant or abandoned properties. Businesses use these data to design and market homes, and home goods.
 People and Relationships The ACS asks respondents about their age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and their relationship to others in the household.	This information, along with other statistics, is used to monitor well-being, discrimination, and economic hardship. Federal agencies use this information to administer programs providing funds and services for groups such as single parents, low-income families, older people living alone, etc. Businesses use these estimates to evaluate local market demand for products and services.


United States Census Bureau
 U.S. Department of Commerce
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CENSUS.GOV
 #MeasuringAmerica
 ACS 800 (8-2015)

First page of the current paper ACS provides no reason for responding.

13120012


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

 **THE American Community Survey**

Start Here

Respond online today at:
<https://respond.census.gov/acs>
OR
Complete this form and mail it
back as soon as possible.

This form asks for information about the
people who are living or staying at the
address on the mailing label and about the
house, apartment, or mobile home located
at the address on the mailing label.

 **If you need help or have questions
about completing this form, please call
1-800-354-7271. The telephone call is free.**

Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD):
Call 1-800-582-8330. The telephone call is free.

¿NECESITA AYUDA? Si usted habla español y
necesita ayuda para completar su cuestionario,
llame sin cargo alguno al 1-877-833-5625.
Usted también puede completar su entrevista
por teléfono con un entrevistador que habla
español. O puede responder por Internet en:
<https://respond.census.gov/acs>

For more information about the American
Community Survey, visit our web site at:
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

➔ **Please print today's date.**
Month Day Year


➔ **Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is
filling out this form. We may contact you if there is a question.**
Last Name
First Name MI
Area Code + Number
 -

➔ **How many people are living or staying at this address?**
• **INCLUDE** everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months.
• **INCLUDE** yourself if you are living here for more than 2 months.
• **INCLUDE** anyone else staying here who does not have another place to
stay, even if they are here for 2 months or less.
• **DO NOT INCLUDE** anyone who is living somewhere else for more than
2 months, such as a college student living away or someone in the
Armed Forces on deployment.
Number of people

➔ **Fill out pages 2, 3, and 4 for everyone, including yourself, who is
living or staying at this address for more than 2 months. Then
complete the rest of the form.**

FORM **ACS-1(2016)**
(07-08-2015)

OMB No. 0607-0810
OMB No. 0607-0936



Proposed new first page for the ACS designed to engage recipients. Note secondary title, connection to “How Your Response Helps America”, and additional explanation of reasons to respond.


(thanks to Thom Allen, Washington State University, for graciously drafting this concept)


THE American Community Survey


Producing quality of life statistics that communities in every state depend on to assess their past and plan for the future.


Address Label


Among the topics in this Census Bureau Survey . . .


Employment


Education


Veterans


Income and Housing Costs

Commuting


Disability and Health Insurance

Housing Characteristics

Owners and Renters

People and Relationships

For more, see the information sheet “How Your Responses Help America”, included in this mailing.



How it is done . . .

Each month we survey several thousand randomly selected addresses in every region of the U.S. to learn how quality of life issues are changing in communities.

The American Community Survey is one of only a few surveys for which all recipients are required to respond. The Census Bureau and its staff are also required by law to protect the confidentiality of responses, and no individual can be identified in the statistics produced from this survey. An explanation of the ACS is available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>.

How to respond . . .

We wrote to you earlier with a request to respond online. We are sending this paper questionnaire to all households that have not yet responded because we realize not everyone can or wants to respond over the Internet. If you would rather complete this survey online, please go to <https://respond.census.gov/acs>

Let's get started . . .

First, please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form.

Last Name

First Name


Middle Initial


Area Code + Number


Next, tell us how many people are living or staying at this address.


Please include everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months, yourself if you are living here for more than 2 months and anyone else staying here who does not have another place to stay, even if they are here for 2 months or less.

But do not include anyone who is living somewhere else for more than 2 months, such as a college student living away or someone in the Armed Forces on deployment.

Now, continue on the next page 

If you need help or have questions about completing this form, please call toll-free 1-800-354-7271. Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD): Call 1-800-582-8330. The telephone call is free.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics
Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



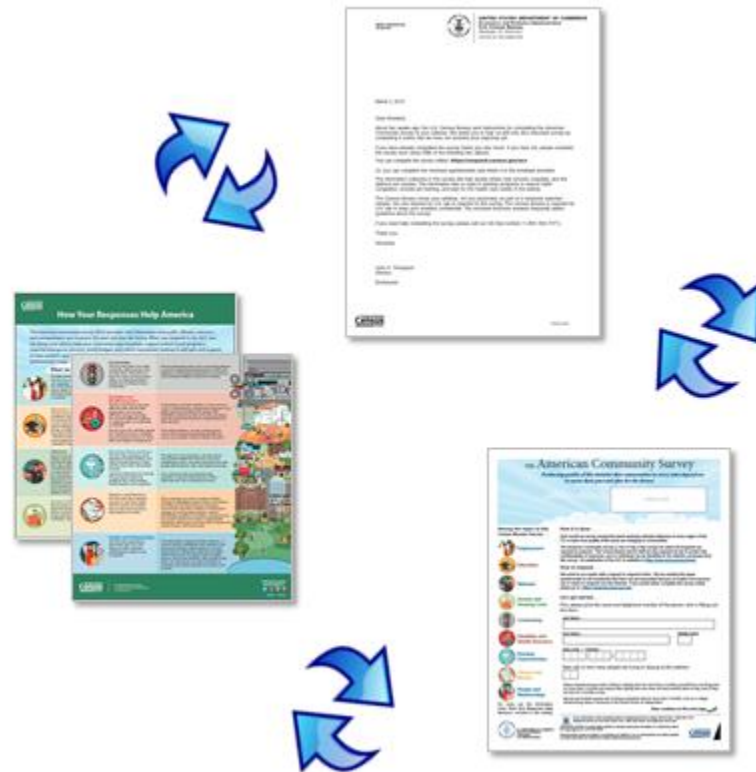
¿NECESITA AYUDA? Si usted habla español y necesita ayuda para completar su cuestionario, llame sin cargo alguno al 1-877-835-5625.

Usted también puede completar su entrevista por teléfono con un entrevistador que habla español. O puede responder por Internet en: <https://respond.census.gov/acs>

Give cover letter greater importance, and link to people living at this address

- Focus on getting people to respond by mail, but convey how having a copy of paper questionnaire may help in knowing questions to be asked.
- Eliminate paragraph on additional follow-up—save for next contact.
- Three paragraphs are virtually the same as an earlier letter, use them to provide new arguments.
- Add date and address at top of letter to personalize this mandatory request.

My goal is to get synergy among fewer, but stronger design elements



Contacts 4 and 5; Need to rethink these postcards, turning the 5th contact into a letter.

- The postcards are different sizes, but redundant visually and with regard to content.
- Similarity decreases likelihood of impact.
- Keep Contact 4 as postcard, but change Contact 5 to a letter.

The current 4th contact: Reminder Postcard

ACS-29(2015) (7-2015)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233-0001
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

A message from the Director, U.S. Census Bureau . . .

Within the last few weeks, the U.S. Census Bureau sent you several requests to complete the American Community Survey. **Now is the time to complete the survey if you have not already done so.** Please complete the questionnaire and return it now OR go to <https://respond.census.gov/acs> to respond online.

Your response to this survey is required by U.S. law. If you do not respond, a Census Bureau interviewer may contact you to complete the survey. Local and national leaders use the information from this survey for planning schools, hospitals, roads, and other community needs.

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

Thank you.

John H. Thompson

The current 5th Contact is also a postcard

ACS-23(2015) (7-2015)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233-0001
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

A message from the Director, U.S. Census Bureau . . .

Within the last few weeks, the U.S. Census Bureau mailed an American Community Survey questionnaire package to your address. **You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey.** The Census Bureau is required by U.S. law to keep your answers confidential. If you have already responded, thank you. If you have not, please complete the questionnaire and send it now, or complete the survey online now at <https://respond.census.gov/acs>.

Your response is critically important to your local community and to your country. If you do not respond, a Census Bureau interviewer may contact you by personal visit to complete the survey.

If you would like to complete the survey by telephone or need assistance, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John H. Thompson'.

John H. Thompson

4th contact stays as postcard, but appeal is refocused

- This is the first use of postcard in implementation sequence, so contrast is desirable.
- Research shows that one postcard helps bring in mail-back response, so make that the focus. Appeal of this postcard is towards those who kept paper questionnaire and have “predisposition” to return it.
- Leave out the emphasis on required by law, and “an enumerator will visit”.

Change 5th contact to letter

- Use letter format to get contrast with 4th contact.
- Put mandatory requirement on outside of letter
- Focus letter on why response is required, and this being last contact prior to efforts to call by telephone or in-person.
- Emphasize online response (paper questionnaire less likely to still be available in household); letter format allows more detail about online response.

In summary

- I applaud the major tests the Census Bureau has made in the last year that have already improved their mail out strategy.
- However, I believe the five contacts now in use can be strengthened significantly to improve combined web/mail response rates (and reduce amount of telephone/in-person follow-up).
- These steps aimed at overcoming the “lower” response that seems inevitable when using a “web-push” instead of “mail-back only” methodology.
- A major effort needs to be invested in rewriting all of the letters so they become more persuasive, more likely to command attention, and mutually supportive with each other.

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3. Messer, Benjamin L. and Don A. Dillman. 2011. "Surveying the General Public Over the Internet Using Address-Based Sampling and Mail Contact Procedures." Public Opinion Quarterly 75(3):429-57.
4. Edwards, Michelle L., Don A. Dillman and Jolene D. Smyth. 2014. An Experimental Test of the Effects of Survey Sponsorship on Internet and Mail Survey Response. Public Opinion Quarterly. 78 (3): 734-750.