



American Community Survey

**Briefing for the National Advisory Committee on
Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations**

**Messaging and Mail Package Assessment
Research**

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October 9, 2014

Research Goals

- **Primary:**

Develop and test messages and mail package refinements to increase ACS self-response rates

- **Secondary:**

- Apply insights from ACS message testing to support general outreach, data dissemination, materials development, and call center and field operations
- Help inform the 2020 Decennial Census Communications Campaign

Research Overview: Project Phases

- **Messaging Research**

- ✓ December 2013: Mental models interviews with internal stakeholders
- ✓ January 2014 – February 2014: Key informant interviews with stakeholders
- ✓ January 2014: Deliberative focus groups with stakeholders who are distrustful of the government
- ✓ January 2014 – February 2014: Message testing - Benchmark survey
- ✓ March 2014 – April 2014: Message testing - Refinement survey

- **Mail Package Assessment**

- ✓ May 2014: Creative design of mail package alternatives and messages to test
- ✓ June 2014 – July 2014: Focus groups and one-on-one interviews
- ✓ September 2014: Quantitative online visual testing

- **Field Test** – To be conducted by ACSO during or after Fall 2014, budget pending

Deliberative Focus Groups

Focus Group Locations and Demographics

Focus Group Location	2012 Self-Response Rate*	% Hispanic Population	% Black Population	% White Population	% Asian Population	% AIAN Population	% NHOPI Population
Albuquerque, NM	.44–.54	45.9	2.8	42.8	2.5	3.9	0.1
Atlanta, GA	.45–.54	5.0	53.6	36.3	3.3	0.2	0.0
Dallas, TX	.30–.54	41.9	24.4	29.5	2.8	0.2	0.0
Los Angeles, CA	.30–.61	48.1	9.3	28.9	11.3	0.2	0.2
Richmond, VA	.54–.61	5.9	50.1	38.9	3.5	0.2	0.0
St. Louis, MO	.54–.67	3.4	49.1	42.2	2.6	0.2	0.0
Washington, DC	.61–.67	9.0	51.3	34.0	3.5	0.2	0.1

- 24 to 28 participants in each group, for a total of n=186 participants
- Los Angeles group was conducted in Spanish with Spanish speakers

*Source: ACS Self-Response Rates (2012) by Congressional District

Key Messaging Research Findings

- Key Findings across Initial Research
 - America knows Census – but not ACS
 - Perception of “irrelevant” or unnecessary questions raise concerns about privacy
 - People believe the government already has the personal information ACS collects
 - Distrust of government is pervasive
 - Participants frequently evaluated the ACS in terms of tangible, community-level benefits - “Community” is key
 - People for whom English is not their first language face unique barriers to response
 - Ensure that when interacting with respondents, the field representatives have the right materials and messages
 - People value convenience and choice in response options

Communications Implications

Beyond the Mailing Package ...

- Share research throughout the Bureau
- Scrub | Re-Cast | Re-calibrate
- Beyond data releases – new initiatives to address these concerns
 - How to better link ACS + Census – and differentiate (2020)
 - How to capture and disseminate localized examples – WIIFM?
 - Whom to partner with to allay concerns
 - Targeted training for news media
 - Targeted training for key influencers



Mail Package Assessment - Research Phase

- Create designs of mail package alternatives and messages to test:
 - May 2014
- Mail Package Focus Groups and Cognitive Interviews:
 - June 23, 2014 – July 2, 2014
- Online Visual Testing:
 - September 5, 2014 – September 19, 2014

Review of Mailing Packages

- Advisory Committee Input
 - Requested and received input from National Advisory Committee and the Census Scientific Committee
 - Most of your feedback was similar to Census' comments on the mail designs

- Independent Expert Input
 - Don Dillman (external SME) reviewed the alternate mail designs and provided feedback

Theme 1: "Official"

Envelope

Front



Back



Theme 2: "Community"

Envelope

Front



Back



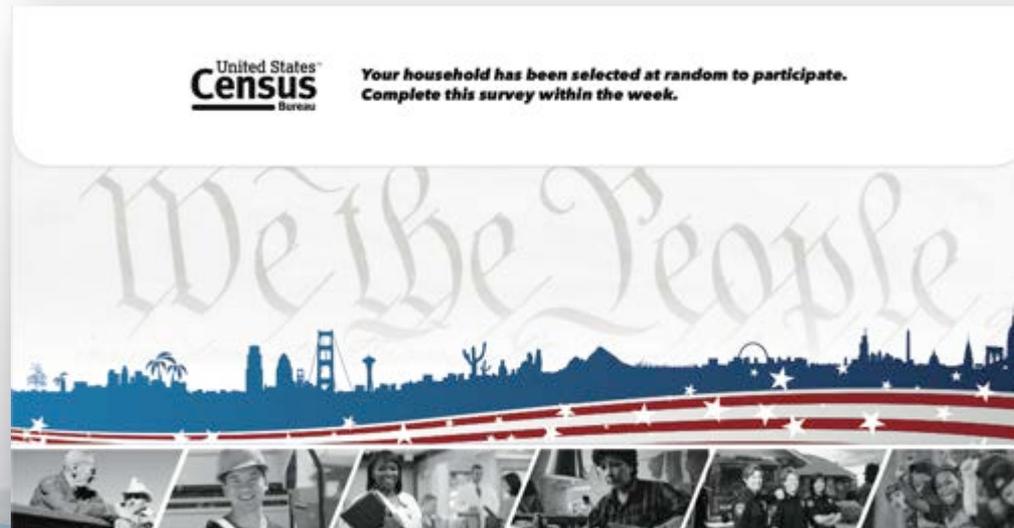
Theme 3: "Patriotic"

Envelope

Front



Back



Mail Package Focus Groups

Focus Group Locations and Demographics

June 23, 2014 – July 2, 2014

Conducted six focus groups with a broad range of participants (emphasis was on recruiting participants from low-response areas). Each group was 90 minutes long, with about 10 participants.

Focus Group Location	2012 Self-Response Rate*	% Hispanic Population	% Black Population	% White Population	% Asian Population	% AIAN Population	% NHOPI Population
Chicago, IL	.30-.61	28.9	32.4	31.7	5.4	0.2	-
Fresno, CA	.30-.44	46.9	7.7	30.0	12.3	0.6	0.1
Miami, FL**	.30-.44	70.0	16.3	11.9	0.9	0.1	-
New Orleans, LA	.30-.44	5.2	59.6	30.5	2.9	0.2	-
New York, NY	.30-.61	28.6	22.8	33.3	12.6	0.2	-
Phoenix, AZ	.30-.44	40.1	6.2	47.1	3.1	1.6	0.2

- Represents less than 0.1% for that population group in that city
- 8 - 10 participants in each group, for a total of 48—60 participants
- **Miami session was conducted with bilingual English-Spanish speakers

*Source: ACS Self-Response Rates (2012) by Congressional District

Mail Package - Key Findings and Implications

- The current package was seen as most effective
- Consider a hybrid of effective design elements
- The ACS name does not register
- “Stick” above “carrot”

Reports

- The following reports are final:
 - Mental Models Interviews with Internal Stakeholders
 - Key Informant Interviews with Stakeholders
 - Deliberative Focus Groups with Stakeholders
 - Message Testing: Benchmark Survey
 - Message Testing: Refinement Study
 - Mail Package Research

- Access reports at:
 - http://www.census.gov/acs/www/library/by_year/2014

Field Test

- Census Bureau will receive recommendations – October 2014
- Census Bureau will develop and implement field tests – Fiscal Year 2015, budget pending
- Census Bureau will analyze and determine final recommendations for program implementation – Fiscal Year 2015

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think the message findings make sense and are consistent with what you hear from the communities you represent?
2. Is there additional research you think we need to pursue?
3. Do you have any suggestions on how we should design the field test?