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

MEMORANDUM FOR: Carol Gore
Vice Chair
National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other
Populations

From: John H. Thompson 
Director
U.S. Census Bureau

Subject: Census Response to NAC member views on AIAN Enrollment
Question Moderator Guide from meeting on October 13, 2015

Thank you very much for providing comments to the Census Bureau regarding its focus group research on the tribal enrollment question. Your comments to the focus group moderator guide were thoughtful and highlighted the very complex issues surrounding how Alaska Natives identify themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, tribe, corporation, Native council, Native association, and Native community. They also highlighted the difficulty of measuring enrollment for Alaska Natives given that they can have multiple and varying relationships with any or all of these entities.

The research team and I carefully considered your comments on how to improve the focus group moderator guide for Alaska Natives, and weighed them against project goals and focus group time constraints. Please see the table below that lists your individual comments, and the Census Bureau's response and rationale for each comment.

Overall, the research team and I interpreted two major themes from your comments. The first theme is the need to account for the fact that Alaska Natives can have relationships to multiple entities, and that some of these entities, such as federally recognized tribes, can use different terms to describe themselves, such as village, council, tribal government, and so on. The second theme is your concern about Alaska Natives giving opinions about whether the Census Bureau should collect tribal enrollment data when many participants will not understand all the implications of enrollment data collection.

To address the first theme, the goal was to account for how Alaska Natives more broadly describe their tribal entities, but to do so within the two-hour focus group time limit. Our solution was to open up the beginning of the focus group by asking questions that allow participants to talk about their tribal entities using the terms appropriate for their particular entities. Later, while participants discuss sample enrollment questions written to stimulate discussion, the moderator will show your list of some of the entities that have become federally recognized tribes. Showing this list will ensure that participants consider a broad range of entities when discussing the sample enrollment questions, and avoid putting these terms in their minds earlier in the focus group, when they are using their own words to describe their tribal entities. The moderator will then ask the participants if the sample questions would work for people in those entities.

Regarding the second theme, the research team and I decided to keep questions about whether the Census Bureau should collect data on tribal enrollment. The questions were kept because one purpose of the focus groups is to learn what Alaska Natives might think and feel when seeing an enrollment question on a census form. We are interested in how they may react and how they might report, if they decide to report at all. The goal of these questions is to get reactions to the idea of collecting enrollment data from people who may represent the general public, and who will likely vary on their familiarity with all enrollment issues. Participant sentiment, qualified by their likely variation in knowledge of relevant issues, will be one of many factors the Census Bureau will consider when deciding the feasibility of a tribal enrollment question in a Census environment. To be clear, the Census Bureau is still working to determine whether a tribal enrollment question can be designed to elicit data that are valid, reliable, and can adequately serve the needs of tribal enrollment data users. The present focus group research is only part of an extensive research effort to help make this determination.

Again, thank you for your very helpful comments on how to improve this tribal enrollment question research. The comments pointed out key issues the Census Bureau must take into account to better investigate the complex nature of tribal enrollment for Alaska Natives.

Carol Gore's Comments to Moderator Guide and the Census Bureau's Responses

Comment Number	Comment Summary	Census Bureau Response	Census Bureau Response Rationale
AK1	At a minimum, every reference to Alaska Native tribal entities should be expanded to also include "councils, associations, and communities."	Have respondents discuss enrollment for all their entities without using any specific names. Later, while participants discuss sample enrollment questions written to stimulate discussion, the moderator will show a list of some of the entities that have become federally recognized tribes. The moderator will then ask participants if the sample questions would work for people in those entities.	This approach accounts for the many ways Alaska Natives more broadly account for their tribal entities, and do so within a two-hour time limit.
AK2	At a minimum, every reference to Alaska Native tribal entities should be expanded to also include "councils, associations, and communities."	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK3	The answer is different for different types of organizations. The Census Bureau may need to break this question down to gather info for each type of entity. Also consider replacing "member" with "members of or otherwise affiliated with."	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.

Comment Number	Comment Summary	Census Bureau Response	Census Bureau Response Rationale
AK4	Regarding Question 4, Part B, ANCSA corporations have Alaska Native shareholders. No person can “enroll” in an ANCSA corporation, so there is no reason to ask if they are enrolled in a corporation.	Keep Question 4, Part B as it is.	Respondents will be allowed to discuss enrollment, when applicable, with the entities with which they have relationships. Participants for whom enrollment does not apply will not be required to respond to this question.
AK5	Consider expanding Question 5, Part B to ask the same question with respect to Alaska Native councils, communities, and associations.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK6	Delete Question 6, Part B.	Recommendation accepted.	Not applicable.
AK7	Consider rewording Question 7, Part B to ask, “What term is appropriate to use when referring to Alaska Native ethnic groups?”	Recommendation accepted.	Not applicable.
AK8	As part of Question 8, Part B, consider including a separate question about “shareholder” status, which is how Alaska Natives describe “membership” in an ANCSA corporation.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK9	Expand Question 9, Part B to ask about relationships to other entities besides tribes.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
Comment	Comment	Census Bureau Response	Census Bureau Response Rationale

Number	Summary		
AK10	There will be gaps in responses to Question 9.4, Part B.	The Census Bureau acknowledges that participants' responses will not be representative of all Alaska Natives.	Not applicable.
AK11	Eliminate Question 10.4, Part B and modify the foregoing questions to include "councils, associations, and communities."	Delete this specific question, but keep discussions about relationships to entities broad.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK12	Explicitly include three additional descriptors for Alaska's federally recognized tribes: Native councils, Native associations, and Native communities.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK13	Eliminate Question 13.0, Part B and modify the foregoing questions to include "councils, associations, and communities."	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK14	Part Question 1.1, C may elicit some responses that are not informed.	Keep question.	Keep question to achieve the purpose of getting reactions to the idea of collecting enrollment data from people who may represent the general public, and who will likely vary on their familiarity with all enrollment issues.
AK15	Expand Questions 7.0-7.2.1, Part C to explicitly name Native corporation, Native council, Native association, or Native community.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
Comment	Comment	Census Bureau Response	Census Bureau Response Rationale

Number	Summary		
AK16	Revise the phrasing in this paragraph to explicitly name Native corporation, Native council, Native association, or Native community.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK17	Question 11.0, Part C may elicit some responses that are not informed.	Delete Question 11.0, Part C.	Delete due to time constraints.
AK18	Replicate language in Question 1 of the Focus Group Questions Handout to explicitly name Native Council, Native Association, or Native Community.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK19	Replicate language in Question 2 of Focus Group Questions Handout to explicitly name Native Council, Native Association, or Native Community.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.
AK20	Revise language in Question 3 of Focus Group Questions Handout to also explicitly name Native Council, Native Association, or Native Community.	Same as response for AK1.	Same as rationale for AK1.

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