

Part A, Chapter 2

Conducting the CPS Interview

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PART A, CHAPTER 2

CONDUCTING THE CPS INTERVIEW

2.A EXPLAINING THE SURVEY

This section provides important background information that you will need to know before starting a CPS interview. Among the topics discussed in this section are:

- how to explain the survey
- survey authorization
- confidentiality
- eligible household respondents
- how to maintain rapport with respondents

How to Introduce the Survey

Show your official Census I.D. and identify yourself. Give the following introduction (or a similar introduction):

“Hello, my name is”

“The Census Bureau regularly conducts the Current Population Survey to collect information on the number and types of jobs Americans need.”

“By law the Census Bureau will treat any information you provide in connection with this survey as confidential. The survey is authorized by an act of Congress. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. However, the accuracy of the survey depends on your cooperation.”

“Did you receive our letter?”

If (s)he did not receive the letter, give him/her a copy and allow time to read it. Then proceed with the survey. At this point you should be at the INTROB screen and ready to begin the interview (Figure A1 below).

Figure A1. INTROB, Beginning the Interview

Current Population Survey - Ver 2.20 Tobacco ver 1.40

Forms Answer Navigate Options Help

CPS ADDR FAQ ROS OPTOUT Exit/F10

♦ Is respondent ready to complete the interview?

☐ 1. Continue

☐ 2. Inconvenient time. Callback needed.

☐ 3. Reluctant respondent - hold for refusal followup

☐ 4. Noninterview

☐ 5. Other outcome OR problem interviewing respondent

☐ 6. Wrong address (wrong case selected)

Ready to Continue? ☐

Replacement HH?

Verify Address

2.B AUTHORIZATION

The information collected in the CPS is authorized by the following:

- **Title 13, U.S. Code, Section 182**

Authorizes the Census Bureau to collect statistical information.

- **Title 29, U.S. Code, Sections 1-9**

Authorizes the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to collect labor force statistics.

- **Title 38, U.S. Code, Section 527**

Authorizes the Census Bureau to collect information for the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

- **Public Laws 89-10, 92-318, 93-380**

Authorizes the Census Bureau to collect information on education.

2.C CONFIDENTIALITY

Within the context of the CPS, the term confidentiality refers to our guarantee to individuals who provide survey information. The name, address, and other information that would identify an individual is not available to persons other than sworn Census Bureau employees, as Title 13 requires.

You must avoid mentioning or providing anyone with materials that would link a specific household or person with a specific survey. When discussing your job, be careful never to reveal any information you get during an interview to an unauthorized person.

There are severe penalties for revealing any information gathered in a Census Bureau survey that would identify an individual.

Unauthorized disclosure of individual information by a sworn Census Bureau employee is punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and imprisonment of up to 5 years.

2.D RESPONDENT IDENTIFICATION POLICY (RIP)

The Respondent Identification Policy (RIP) was instituted by the Census Bureau to protect the confidentiality of respondents' information within their own households. The policy prohibits the Census Bureau from revealing confidential data to other household members unless the original respondent gives authorization.

2.D.1 How RIP affects Basic CPS

The answer to the RIP question will determine if you can conduct dependent interviewing or not. If the original respondent, which we refer to as the "RIP respondent," wishes their information to be confidential, and they are not available for a subsequent interview, you cannot conduct dependent interviewing. However, if the RIP respondent permits you to verify their information with anyone in the household, then you can conduct dependent interviewing. The RIP respondent name will appear on the START_CP (CAPI) or HELLO (CATI) screens if the RIP respondent has requested that their information not be verified with anyone in the household. If this is the case, and you are not speaking with the RIP respondent, then you cannot conduct dependent interviewing.

2.D.2 RIP Question

There is only one question that determines if the dependent questions are asked of only the RIP respondent or of any other household member in the household. The RIP question (RIPFLG) (Figure A1a.) is answered as (1) Yes ONLY if the respondent will allow

anyone else in the household to verify their information in subsequent interviews. If the respondent DOES NOT wish their information to be verified by other household members in subsequent interviews, then an answer of (2) No should be selected.

Figure A1a. RIPFLG, Respondent Identification Policy

The screenshot shows a software interface for the 'Current Population Survey - Ver 1.19 Displaced Workers supplement 1.19'. At the top, there are menu options: Forms, Answer, Navigate, Options, and Help. Below this is a navigation bar with buttons: CPS, ADDR, FAQ, Chg Resp, RDS, OPTOUT, Skip Person, and Exit/F10. The main content area displays a message: 'We will recontact this household next month to update this information. If we are unable to reach you and we talk to someone else instead, is it OK if we refer to some of the information you gave us?'. Below the message is a blue link: '♦ If needed: For example, we might say "Last month (name) was a teacher. Is (s/he) still a teacher?"'. There are two radio button options: '1. Yes' and '2. No'. Below the options is a large text area for additional information. At the bottom of the form, there is a status bar showing: 00000201, RIPFLG, 2:57:22 PM, 2-11-2008, 1, 1.1, and 484/631.

The instrument will only allow one person to be the RIP respondent. Once the RIP question is asked and the RIP respondent is selected, the RIP question will not be re-asked in subsequent months. You may change the answer to the RIPFLG question during the initial interview only. The only time the RIPFLG will change in subsequent interviews is when there is a replacement household.

2.E ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLD RESPONDENTS

Any household member 15 years of age or older is technically eligible to act as a respondent. If at all possible, try to interview the most knowledgeable member of the household. In most situations, this individual will be the reference person or the spouse of the reference person.

Reference person. The first person mentioned by the respondent, who either owns or rents the "sample unit" (e.g., house, apartment).

If it becomes obvious that the household member you are interviewing is unable to answer the survey questions, ask to speak to a more knowledgeable respondent. If a more knowledgeable respondent is not available, arrange to call back when one is available.

2.F RETAINING RAPPORT WITH RESPONDENTS

You begin to build a harmonious relationship with the respondent when (s)he first answers the door or phone. Maintaining this rapport throughout the interview will ensure that you collect full and valid information. Through your sincere understanding and interest in the respondent, you provide a friendly atmosphere in which the respondent can talk honestly and fully. If rapport is broken because the respondent finds a particular question "too personal," take time to reassure him/her about the confidential nature of the survey.

2.G ANSWERING RESPONDENT QUESTIONS

A small percentage of respondents will want additional information before agreeing to participate in the survey. Some respondents may be reluctant to provide information about themselves or family members or may refuse to be interviewed. It is your responsibility to sell the survey. A good selling job at the very beginning of the survey (that is, the initial interview) will eliminate trouble for you and your fellow field representatives and interviewers in succeeding months. You can bring up the H_PURPOSE screen, which lists Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), at any time by pressing the [Shift] and [F2] keys simultaneously, or by selecting the FAQ tab located at the top of the screen (see Figure A2 below).

To convert reluctant respondents, try to identify his/her specific objection(s) to participating in the survey and tailor your answer accordingly. A thorough

understanding of the survey is the key to a good explanation. The following are a few examples of questions you may receive and suggested responses:

2.G.1 What is this survey all about?

“The Census Bureau conducts the Current Population Survey each month to provide an up-to-date estimate of the number of persons working, the number who are unemployed, and many other related facts. Occasionally we ask additional questions on education, health, family income, housing, and other important subjects.”

“It is extremely important to know how many persons are out of work from month to month. Government officials, labor groups, and business people need accurate information on the current unemployment situation to know how many and what types of jobs are needed. It is easier to resolve employment problems if we know, well in advance, the direction the economy is moving.”

Figure A2. H_PURPOSE, Frequently Asked Questions

Current Population Survey - Ver 2.20 Tobacco ver 1.40

Forms Answer Navigate Options Help

CPS ADDR FAQ ROS OPTOUT Exit/F10

♦ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

☐ 1. What is this survey all about?

☐ 2. Who uses this information? What good is it?

☐ 3. How was I selected for this survey?

☐ 4. How many times will I be interviewed?

☐ 5. I hesitate to tell some things about myself. What protection do I have?

☐ 6. Is this survey authorized by law?

☐ 7. Why do you include me? I'm retired.

☐ 8. Why am I being interviewed again? I was interviewed last year.

☐ 9. Proceed with interview

FAQ

2.G.2 Who uses this information? What good is it?

“In a country as big as ours and one that changes so rapidly between decennial censuses, people in government, businesses, and other groups need up-to-date facts in order to plan efficient and adequate programs. It is important to know how many people are working or out of work (to help direct programs which would contribute to an expanding economy and provide new jobs), how many children will be attending school (to plan for schools and the training of an adequate number of teachers), how many new families are forming (to plan for adequate housing to meet their needs), and so on. The CPS is one of the most important and timely sources of information used to make such plans.” See Part A, Chapter 1 for a discussion of the uses of CPS data.

2.G.3 How was I selected for this survey?

“Actually, we selected your address, rather than you personally, for this survey. Each month, we scientifically select about 15,000 groups of addresses to represent the United States. Each of the address groups contains about four housing units and altogether result in about 48,000 interviewed households each month. If you should move away while your address is still in the survey, we would interview the family that moves in.”

2.G.4 How many times will I be interviewed?

“We interview occupants of a dwelling for 8 months, 4 consecutive months in the current year and the same 4 months in the following year.”

“We interview for 8 months because it is important to see if the employment situation of the occupant changes. It is also less

expensive to interview the same dwelling for 8 months.”

2.G.5 I hesitate to tell some things about myself. What protection do I have?

“All information individuals give to the Census Bureau is held in the strictest confidence by law (Title 13, United States Code, Section 9). All Census Bureau employees have taken an oath to this effect and are subject to a jail penalty and a fine if we disclose any information survey respondents give us.”

2.G.6 Is this survey authorized by law?

“Yes. Title 13, United States Code, Section 182, and Title 29, United States Code, Sections 1 through 9, authorized the collection of most of the information we request in this survey.”

“In addition, portions of the survey in any 1 month may be authorized by one of the following: Title 7, United States Code, Sections 1621-1627; Title 38, United States Code, Section 219; and Public Laws 890-10, 92-318, and 93-380. In some months, the survey may contain questions authorized under laws other than those cited.”

2.G.7 Why do you include me? I'm retired.

Some retired persons may feel that their activities are not important to this type of survey and wonder why we include them.

The following may help you explain the survey to them:

“In order to have an accurate picture of the entire population, it is necessary to include persons in all age groups. Our experience with interviewing retired persons shows that

many of them are actually participants in the labor force because they work part time or are looking for work. This information, along with data on other subjects such as income, health, and housing, assists in the measurement of the economic condition of the elderly population as a whole.”

2.G.8 Why am I being interviewed again? I was interviewed last year.

“Our representatives contact occupants of a selected dwelling unit eight times – 4 months in one year and the same 4 months in the following year. Our representatives contacted this address four times last year and your address is scheduled for four more interviews.”

2.G.9 Respondent gave information in Decennial Census.

Some respondents may say that they already reported this information in the Decennial Census. The following approach may be useful in clarifying differences:

“The Census Bureau conducts the Decennial Census every 10 years. It gives government officials a good idea of how many people are living in this country. We conduct labor force surveys monthly to determine how many Americans are employed and unemployed each month.”

2.G.10 Respondent not affected by the employment situation.

The level of unemployment affects almost everyone. When a lot of people are out of work, the entire economy suffers. The suffering is not limited to those individuals

who cannot find a job. Business people will experience slumping sales. Professionals will find clients unable to pay bills. Salaried employees may suffer reduction in pay or hours. Farmers will find demand for their products dropping. In sum, when employment declines, almost everyone suffers.

2.H THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE SURVEY

The fact that participation in the CPS is voluntary does not diminish your responsibility to convert reluctant respondents. When a person says the survey is voluntary and that (s)he would prefer not to participate, the following points may help you to obtain an interview:

- The importance and uses of the data. Refer to page A1-3 for an explanation of the uses of labor force data.
- The brevity of the survey. Explain that the interviews take only 10 to 15 minutes per household.
- The confidentiality of the survey data. Title 13, United States Code, require that the data collected be seen only by Census Bureau employees who have sworn an oath of office. It also requires that we publish only statistical summaries of the data.
- Ask the respondent to allow you to begin the interview on a “trial basis.” Explain that the person does not have to answer any questions (s)he feels are too personal. In many cases the respondents provide most, if not all, of the needed information.

2.I BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW

The first month a household is in sample the first few screens allow you to verify the segment and housing unit listing. You also will record the household roster and collect demographic information for each household member listed. Following are a few examples of the information collected in the first month's interview:

- list of persons living or staying in the household
- relationship of household members to the reference person
- age
- race
- ethnicity
- sex
- armed forces membership and veteran's status
- education
- nativity and immigration

In subsequent months you only collect missing information.

2.I.1 How to Ask Questions

- **Ask exactly as worded**

You must ask questions exactly as worded so they will yield comparable results. **Avoid changing** words or phrases and adding or dropping words to the question.

- **Ask every question**

Although the answer to a particular question may seem obvious to you, do not fill the answer without asking the question. The respondent may provide an answer which applies to a question asked later in the interview. In this case you may verify the answer to the question. It is important that

you ask or verify each applicable question. If the respondent misunderstands or misinterprets a question:

- **Repeat the question as worded and give the respondent another chance to answer.**
- If you still do not get an acceptable response, **use the probing techniques discussed below.**

2.I.2 How to probe

When the respondent's answer does not meet the question's objective, probe to clarify or expand his/her answer.

The probing procedures listed below are useful in stimulating discussion. Introduce these devices casually as a natural expression of interest.

- **Brief assenting comments**, such as - "Yes, I see," show the respondent that you are giving your attention to the answer. They often stimulate the respondent to talk further.
- **An expectant pause** accompanied by an inquiring look after the respondent has given only a brief reply often conveys to the respondent that (s)he has merely begun answering the question. It will often bring forth further response.
- **Repeating the question** or listing the response categories (when applicable) is useful when the respondent does not understand the question, misinterprets it, seems unable to make up his/her mind, or strays from the subject.
- **Repeating the respondent's reply** is useful in helping to clarify the response and prompting the respondent to enlarge upon his/her statement. Be sure you adhere

strictly to the respondent's answer and do not interject your own ideas.

- **Neutral questions** (probes) in a neutral tone of voice will bring fuller, clearer responses. For example:

“I don't quite understand what you mean.”

or

“Which figure would you say comes closest?” (Probe to clarify hours worked last week, weeks looking for work, or income.)

Such questions show your interest and are successful when used correctly. You must immediately recognize how the respondent's answer fails to meet the question's objective and use a neutral probe to get the correct information. Your manner of asking neutral questions is important; a sharp demanding tone can damage rapport. It is sometimes good for you to appear slightly bewildered by the respondent's answer. Indicate in your probe that it might be you who did not understand. (For example - *“I'm not sure what you mean by that, could you tell me a little more?”*) This can arouse the respondent's desire to help someone who is trying to do a good job. However, do not overplay this technique. The respondent should not get the feeling that you do not know when a question is properly answered.

Interviewers often have to separate the facts wanted from the respondent's attitudes. The basic procedure is:

- Know the question's objective thoroughly.
- Know how to probe when the answer is inadequate, while maintaining good rapport.

2.I.3 Importance of Using Neutral Probes

We have stressed that you need to stimulate discussion. **This does not mean that you should influence the respondent's answer or unnecessarily prolong the interview.** Probing should be as neutral as possible so you do not distort the respondent's answers. When you ask neutral questions of all respondents, we have comparability between all the interviewers in the survey. If each interviewer asks a leading probe, we would not be comparing responses to the same questions. This would thoroughly defeat the goal of having a standardized survey.

2.I.4 Respondent Replies “I Don't Know”

Respondents do not always mean what they first say. The “I don't know” answer might mean:

- The respondent does not understand the question and answers “I don't know” to avoid saying that (s)he did not understand.
- The respondent is thinking and says, “I don't know” to give him/her time to think.
- The respondent may be trying to evade the issue, so (s)he begs off with the “I don't know” response.
- The respondent may actually not know.

Discussion often presents a truer picture of the respondent's thoughts and may help you determine if you should probe further.

2.J IF YOU CAN'T GET AN INTERVIEW

Noninterview Household. A household for which you cannot obtain information because:

- The unit is occupied but an interview was not possible, or
- The unit is occupied by persons not eligible for interview, or
- The unit is not occupied or not eligible for sample.

Noninterviews fall into three groups--Type A, B, and C. The Type A group consists of households occupied by persons eligible for interview, whom you should have interviewed but could not.

Sample units which you do not interview for other reasons are Type B or C noninterviews. Refer to Part C, Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of noninterview types and procedures.

You will need to make a personal visit to units in your assignment that were noninterviews the previous month. The exception is those households reported as Type C noninterviews (since they are ineligible for sample) and the **one** Type B situation described below.

If **all** the following conditions exist, you can complete the CPS by telephone for a Type B

noninterview without making a personal visit to the unit.

1. The unit was a Type B noninterview in the preceding month.
2. The unit is very far from your home, and you are not planning to return to the area for other interviews.
3. You have the name and telephone number of a reliable respondent (e.g., owner, rental agent, knowledgeable neighbor, or local merchant) and a telephone interview is acceptable with that person.

If one of the above conditions is not met, you must make a personal visit to the sample unit.

2.K ENDING THE INTERVIEW

After completing the labor force section of the interview and collecting any supplement information (if necessary), you are ready to end the interview.

The last section of the interview requests a phone number if one is available. It helps you determine if the household will be available next month, if a Sunday interview is possible, and exits you from the interview. We call this the “**BACK**” portion of the interview. Refer to Part C, Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the “**BACK**” of the CPS interview.

Be sure you leave the respondent with a friendly feeling towards you and the Census Bureau, so the way is clear for future contact.

END OF PART A

The next section of this manual contains CPS labor force concepts.