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**Feedback from Field Staff on
National Health Interview Survey Materials**

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Disclaimer: This report is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. Any views expressed on the methodological issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau. This report has been reviewed for disclosure avoidance and has been approved under CBDRB-FY23-CBSM002-002.

Abstract

The U.S. Census Bureau's Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) conducted focus group research with field staff for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) to collect feedback on various topics, including respondent-facing materials, follow-up letters, a new proposed Sample Adult Letter, and field staff's thoughts and experiences about respondent incentives. CBSM conducted six focus groups with 43 total field staff, including 28 Field Representatives, eight Field Supervisors, and seven Research Survey Managers.

The results show that field staff were partial towards some respondent-facing materials and disliked when the materials mentioned the voluntary nature of the survey or how long the survey would take. They also found it easy to request follow-up letters, although they said that it was difficult to know when the letters would arrive at respondents' homes. The field staff liked the idea of the Sample Adult Letter and suggested some minor changes. They provided mixed feedback on how effective they thought respondent incentives would be. There was also more support among field staff for the use of FedEx over USPS for delivering follow-up letters. In this report, CBSM provides recommendations based on the feedback received in these focus groups, and also points out the need in some cases for respondent testing to collect more pertinent feedback on some of the topics.

Keywords: Focus group, Incentive, Mail materials

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INTRODUCTION

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is a national survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The results from the NHIS provide national data about the health and wellbeing of the noninstitutionalized population of the United States on a variety of health topics. These data are used to monitor trends in illness and disability, as well as to make epidemiologic and policy decisions. The NHIS is conducted with personal household interviews, which are conducted by Field Representatives (FRs). These FRs are overseen by their Field Supervisors (FSs). Management of FRs and FSs is split among six different regional offices (ROs). Each RO has a Research Survey Manager (RSM) who oversees operations in that RO and helps supervise the FSs.

The purpose of this research is to talk with FRs, FSs, and RSMs about their experiences in the field, since they are the eyes and ears of the survey. FRs in particular interact directly with respondents to the survey, and so their insights are invaluable when evaluating operations. FSs and RSMs see the operation from a higher level and are therefore able to provide different insight than an FR might be able to. We held focus groups with employees from all three groups to try to get a more comprehensive picture of the topics of interest.

Study Goals

The two primary topics of interest for these focus groups were: 1) which respondent-facing materials are used by FRs, and how are they used? and 2) what has been the experience of FRs with follow-up letters, and what has been helpful or not helpful with respect to the follow-up letters? Additional topics of interest included gathering impressions from FRs, FSs, and RSMS about the content of a proposed new Sample Adult Letter, which would be provided to respondents to provide information about the selection of the household sample adults. A further additional topic was what logo the field staff felt would be better to use on different materials, between Census, NHIS, and CDC logos. Finally, our last topic was to ask FRs, FSs, and RSMs whether they had any experience with other surveys providing incentives to respondents, or if they had experience with a survey that provided an advance notice postcard or an envelope with a “fun fact” to entice respondents to complete the survey.

With respect to respondent-facing materials, we wanted to know about what materials FRs have ready for use in different situations. We focused on what materials FRs have ready for use when they approach a house for the first time, and how that differed from the materials they have ready for use when approaching a house in subsequent visits. We also wanted to know about instances when an FR cannot make contact with the household respondent, especially if and how FRs left materials behind. Finally, we were also interested in if and how FRs use respondent-facing materials to attempt to sway hesitant respondents.

We also asked about the follow-up letters that are available to FRs to have sent to households. For these, we were interested in how FRs currently use the letters, in what situations, and how

often. We were also interested to know if FRs thought that the follow-up letters matched their intended scenarios, and if any of the letters were not helpful. We also asked about the shipping method for the letters, the process for requesting the letters, and FRs' ideas for improving follow-up letters in the future.

During the focus groups, we also wanted to gather insight on the perceived effectiveness of a new Sample Adult Letter, not currently in production. After showing FRs, FSs, and RSMs (collectively "field staff" hereafter) the letter, we wanted to know how useful they thought the letter would be, and if there was anything about the text or design of the letter that they would change.

Finally, we wanted to know if any of the FRs, FSs, or RSMs have worked on any other surveys that sent postcards to sampled addresses alerting them of the upcoming advance letter and instructing them to open it when it arrived. We also wanted to know if they had worked on a survey that included a fun fact on the envelope or a monetary incentive to help interest respondents. In any of these cases, we wanted to know how effective the method was and more details about the implementation of the method.

The moderator guides for the FR, FS, and RSM focus groups are included as Appendices A, B, and C respectively.

Methodology

We conducted a total of six focus groups for this project: four focus groups with FRs, one with FSs, and one with RSMs. The focus groups were conducted July 5-13, 2022. We tried to coordinate the FR focus groups to have FRs from the same ROs, trying to match together FRs who may have had similar experiences. Each of the FR focus groups had 5-10 participants, while the FS focus group had 8 participants, and the RSM focus group had 7 participants. Table 1 shows the number and type of participants by focus group, which represented all ROs: New York City, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Table 1: Participants and ROs represented by Focus Group

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5	Focus Group 6
Participants	RSMs (7)	FRs (6)	FRs (5)	FSs (8)	FRs (7)	FRs (10)

The participants for the focus groups were recruited to represent the different ROs to gain insight into the research questions on a national level. The participants for the focus groups were chosen by each RO.

CBSM conferred with staff from NCHS to compile the moderator guides, found in Appendices A, B, and C. These moderator guides include questions designed to collect field staff's thoughts and experiences regarding respondent-facing materials and follow-up letters, any experience that

field staff had on other surveys that used incentives or fun facts on their mailings, and how field staff felt about a newly proposed Sample Adult Letter.

The focus groups were all conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams, a secure videoconferencing application. Each focus group was led by one moderator and had one note taker. We also recorded all the focus groups using Snagit. Participants in the focus groups were not sent any materials prior to the focus groups. During the sessions, the moderator showed relevant materials on a shared screen, such as examples of what was meant by respondent-facing materials, and the Sample Adult Letter on which we were collecting feedback. We also had members from the Census Bureau, NCHS, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) observing each of the sessions. At the end of each session, we provided a small window of time for questions from these observers.

After the focus groups, we used the notes and the recordings to produce summaries of the focus groups for analysis purposes. We then analyzed the content of those summaries to compile the results found in this report.

Findings

Respondent-facing Materials

We found during the focus groups that the most commonly used materials at the doorstep during initial visits were business cards and copies of the advance letter. Some FRs favored leaving a handwritten note for the respondent, saying that they felt it was heartfelt and personal. One FR said that leaving longer handwritten notes shows that the FR put effort in, even if the respondent does not read the note. One FR who mentioned bringing copies of the advance letter with them mentioned that “People seem to like having something to hold” while the FR was talking to them.

Some FRs mentioned that it was important for them to have materials in both English and Spanish because of the neighborhoods they work in. They did not specify whether this meant materials with both languages (e.g. English on one side of a document and Spanish on the other), or if this meant having Spanish materials available in addition to English materials. Notably, NHIS already has separate materials for English and Spanish.

Other respondent-facing materials that focus group participants mentioned using on a first visit were the following materials: How We Measure America, Request for Appointment, Household Surveys Currently Being Conducted, A Healthy America Begins with You, and confidentiality brochures.

When asked about what materials FRs used or left after the first visit, multiple FRs mentioned leaving Request for Appointment and Sorry I Missed You materials, while others said they left a copy of the Advance Letter with their business card stapled to it. Multiple FRs also mentioned

leaving handwritten notes, stating that they believed it added a personal touch. Some FRs also said that leaving less was more, because respondents don't like you to be too pushy.

We also wanted to gather information about how FRs were leaving materials with respondents. FRs said that it was necessary to leave materials in a place that would respect confidentiality, but also where respondents will see them. One common subject that came up was whether to tape materials to the respondents' doors. While some FRs mentioned that they were not supposed to use tape, others said that they would tape materials to respondents' doors using painter's tape to not cause any damage. Many FRs also mentioned that they would wedge materials in the side of the door or the weather stripping, although one FR said that this can sometimes be a problem if respondents enter their home through the garage, they will not see something that was left at their front door if they never use their front door.

We asked FRs if they were currently provided with something like a plastic bag that can be hung on a doorknob or door handle that they could leave materials in. FRs said that they are not currently provided with anything like that. They said it would be easy to hang them over door handles, but also wondered if there was a more environmentally friendly option than plastic bags.

Follow-up Letters

We wanted to hear field staff's views on the follow-up letters and the process for requesting follow-up letters. These are letters that FRs can request to have sent to a household to address various topics they feel are relevant to that household. One FR in particular said that follow-up letters tend to be very clinical and not engaging, which tends to lead to pushback from respondents.

Some of the most common comments about the follow-up letters were about the voluntary nature of the survey and the stated estimate of completion time. Several FRs said that mentioning that the survey is voluntary gives respondents an out, and that they will then not complete the survey. Several FRs also said that the time it takes to complete the survey varies a lot, and so they prefer not to tell the respondent how long the survey will take, since that might influence whether the respondent decides to complete the survey or not.

When asked about which letters they used the most, field staff reported that the most commonly used follow-up letters were the Please Call letter, the No One Home letter, and the Information letter. Although FRs mentioned using the Please Call letter, they said that it does not seem to be very effective in getting respondents to call. One FR said that respondents misunderstood the Please Call letter and thought that it meant the FR would be calling the respondent. Some FRs said that the No Time letter did not work, and that they used the Information letter instead, but another FR said that they found the No Time letter to be good and unique.

FRs also mentioned some materials that they thought would be helpful to have. Some FRs wondered if it would be possible to get a Partial Case letter for cases that are initially left as partials. One RSM wondered if it would be possible to get Thank You letters that they could mail to respondents who do phone interviews. They said that Thank You letters are handed to respondents at doorsteps, but there is currently nothing that they can mail to phone respondents. One FR also wondered about the possibility of letters being available in multiple languages, for example having English on one side and Spanish on the other.

As far as the process for requesting follow-up letters, field staff generally said the process was very easy. Two FRs mentioned that it would be helpful if there was a way to know the status of the letter, when it was sent and if it was delivered.

We also asked field staff if they thought the method of delivery was important for the letters, and whether it mattered if letters were delivered with USPS or FedEx. There were some mixed feelings from field staff about this and they felt that there were advantages to each. More FRs mentioned that they preferred FedEx because it seemed more official and gives the FR more credibility when interacting with the respondent. Some FRs said that respondents might not open mail from USPS thinking that it is junk mail, while they would definitely open something from FedEx. Another FR also mentioned that FedEx is better for rural areas where many addresses do not have mailboxes. The FRs who pointed out advantages for USPS mentioned that it was a lower cost, and that it might seem less threatening.

Logos

We asked field staff about which logo they felt was most useful in gaining respondent cooperation through letters. One FR said that it was important to have consistency in logos, noting that the letters have an NCHS logo, while FR badges have the CDC logo. Field staff pointed out that, while the CDC logo could be good because its relation to health topics lends credibility, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a level of distrust with the CDC. Some FRs mentioned that they have had respondents refuse because of the CDC logo.

Regarding the Census logo, one FR mentioned that the Census Bureau is seen as a benign government agency, and another mentioned that the Census has credibility. However, some FRs said that the Census logo may not be best because of anti-government sentiment in some parts of the country. Other field staff thought that it might be confusing to have the Census logo, since it might be confused with the decennial census. Many FRs agreed that both the CDC and Census have taken hits in their credibility in recent years, with one FR saying that it was a “coin flip” which one respondents might be more upset with.

Some FRs wondered if it would be an option to use the logo for either NCHS or NHIS.

Sample Adult Letter

As part of testing for this project, we wanted to get reactions from field staff on a proposed new Sample Adult Letter (see Appendix D). This letter is not currently in production but is under review by NCHS.

There were many positive comments from field staff about the Sample Adult Letter. Field staff said that it was simple, gets straight to the point, and avoids topics such as the length of the interview and voluntary nature of the interview, topics which FRs pointed out might discourage participation from respondents. Field staff also said that the letter was flexible because it can be left at the respondent's home or mailed to the respondent. They also said that it gives the FR the ability to determine how late in the day the interview can take place with the line "Your appointment can be any time before ____."

While many comments were positive, staff pointed out a few things they felt could be improved about the letter. They said that the phrase "you were selected" might make the letter seem threatening. Staff also said that the letter does not explain the term "sample" in Sample Adult. Finally, staff also said that the FAQ about the need to interview the adult who was in the sample might still not be convincing enough.

Incentives and Fun Facts

We were interested in learning about experiences that field staff have had working on other surveys, especially as it related to incentives for completion of the survey. Few of those in the focus groups had experience with other surveys that used incentives, but some FRs mentioned using incentives on the NHIS Teen Survey. One FR mentioned working on a survey that gave incentives on a gift card, but there were sometimes issues with the card not working. Another FR said that they worked on a survey where the incentive amount was random (\$10, \$20, \$30, or \$50).

Even field staff who had not worked on surveys with incentives gave some of their opinions. One FR thought that \$5 would not be enough to incentivize people since it will not buy much. Some FRs thought that the incentive would be a good idea and might at least get somebody to call. One FR mentioned that even a \$25 incentive might be cheaper than paying to send someone to a home three times.

Others did not think it would be effective. One person said that the job of an FR is to convince people to do the survey just with information and should not need an incentive to do that. Another FR said that for many people, if they are not going to do a survey, they just are not going to do it, and an incentive will not change that fact.

Regarding having a fun fact on mailing materials, very few in the focus groups had anything to say about the topic. One FR said that they were involved in a survey about hunting and fishing that included a fun fact on the mailing and they had a tremendous response. Another FR said that they had done this on a survey a long time ago and they thought people really enjoyed it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this section, we discuss conclusions and recommendations from the focus groups we conducted to collect feedback from field staff about their experiences with letters and materials in the field. In summary, we conducted six focus groups via Microsoft Teams with FRs, FSs, and RSMs, collecting in-depth qualitative data and feedback on aspects of NHIS that worked well, aspects that did not work well, and field staff's opinions on materials and letters.

- Regarding respondent materials, we recommend that NCHS look into the possibility of providing FRs bags to hang materials from door handles.
- We also recommend considering alternatives to plastic bags to be more environmentally friendly.
- To the extent possible, we also recommend that materials be made available in English and Spanish. This could be separate materials for each language, or bilingual materials that incorporate both languages.
- Based on FR feedback, we recommend that some materials allow space for FRs to leave personal notes to respondents.
- Finally, if there is a policy against taping items to doors or homes, consider emphasizing this in training for FRs.

Based on field staff feedback about follow-up letters, we recommend considering the addition of the following materials:

- Partial Case letter for households that are only able to complete a partial survey during an FR visit
- A letter describing how responding will benefit respondents
- Letters in multiple languages, potentially with English on one side and Spanish or another language on the other
- Thank You letters to mail to phone interview respondents
- Follow-up letter with instructions to verify the credibility of the survey and the FR

We recommend that the Sample Adult Letter continue to be reviewed or revised to eventually be used in the field. Based on feedback from field staff, we recommend changing the term “survey” to “study” to make it seem more important to respondents. We also recommend having the FRs staple their business card to the letter instead of printing the FR's name on the letter to

make the letter more flexible. We recommend also adding a line on the letter stating that this study informs the local business community as a way to express the importance of the survey.

We also note that, although we have received feedback from field staff on many topics, some of those topics would be better determined with respondent testing. We recommend that the logo that is used be consistent across letters, materials, and FR badges, and we suggest respondent testing to determine which logo would be most effective to encourage response. We also recommend respondent testing to determine whether FedEx or USPS would receive a better response. Finally, we also recommend carrying out respondent testing to determine whether fun facts and monetary incentives would be effective ways to encourage participation. If a monetary incentive would be effective, then what amounts would be most cost effective. Testing could be done via cognitive interviews, focus groups, or via a field test, depending on the resources available.

Appendix A: FR Moderator's Guide

FR Feedback on NHIS Materials Use

Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Date: ____/____/____

Start time: _____ AM / PM

Moderators: _____

Mode: In-person Remote—audio only Remote—audio/video

INTRODUCTION [15 mins intro-to icebreaker]

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [MODERATOR NAME] and I will be guiding today's conversation. I work for the Census Bureau in the Center for Behavioral Science Methods [IF REMOTE: and I'm actually talking to you all today from [LOCATION]]. We have a couple of other people listening to our conversation today and helping me take notes so that we don't miss anything important that you say. We'll also be recording our session today so we can make sure to get all your feedback. Myself and the other people working on the project are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those working on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this group.

I sent you all the privacy notice via email. Does anyone have any questions about that or any concerns? [ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.] Great, I'll go ahead and turn the recording on now. ****TURN ON RECORDERS**** I'm going to ask each person to confirm that they've read the notice and give consent to be recorded for this focus group. _____, can you confirm that? [WAIT FOR PERSON TO SAY YES. ASK EACH PERSON TO CONFIRM.]

We really appreciate that you are taking this time out of your day to share your feedback with us. You are our eyes and ears in the field and you know what worked well and what didn't work well, so thank you for being here.

We have a few goals today. First, we'd like to hear from you about the respondent materials that you use. Second, we'd like your ideas about followup letters and their use in the field. Finally, we would like to hear from you about other letters, and other strategies for gaining cooperation from respondents.

- **Also on the call is [ASSISTANT NAME]. (S)he is my colleague from [AGENCY] and will also help me with today's conversation.**

- **[If necessary] Joining the call just as observers to learn about your experience are staff from NCHS and Census HQ. The observers are also sworn to protect your confidentiality.**

RULES

Before we get started, I just want to mention a few basic rules.

- **First, I will be asking a lot of questions.** There are no right or wrong answers to my questions; we just want your honest opinions. We don't need to have everyone agree. In fact, if you have a view different from others it is especially important for us to hear it because you may be the only person who is representing a different point of view here today.
- **Be respectful of other's people comments.** It is fine to disagree with each other's comments. We are interested in listening to everybody's opinion in a respectful manner.
- **Please keep respondents' information confidential.** This means that if you want to tell us about any experiences that you had administering the survey to a respondent, please don't share respondents' names or any other information that could identify a respondent. Please also keep each other's comments confidential after this focus group as well.
- **Only one person speaks at a time and we'd like everyone to get a turn.** Please do not speak while somebody else is talking because it's hard to understand when too many people talk at once. Please speak up and let us know what you are thinking. If you are the type of person who always participates, please give a chance to others to talk.
- Due to **limited time**, I must move the discussion along and may sometimes have to interrupt in order to do so. Please do not be offended. If you have anything else that you'd like to share with us that you did not have time to say, please send your feedback in an email to fld.nhis.questions@census.gov.
- Please turn off your phone and put it away before we begin, and avoid any sort of multitasking like working, browsing the internet, etc.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

ICEBREAKER

The first thing I want to do is get to know each of you a little better. Let's go around the room and have each one of you tell us briefly:

- Your first name
- How long you've been working as an FR

- What you like to do in your free time

I'll go first. My name is... [BE BRIEF SO WE CAN GET THROUGH EVERYONE]

Please feel free to jump in and introduce yourself.

[SINCE THIS IS A POPCORN STYLE OF INTRODUCTIONS MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.]

PROBES

Thank you for telling us a little more about you. Now we are going to start by talking about respondent materials that are used in the field. We will talk about follow-up letters a little bit later.

RESPONDENT MATERIALS (OTHER THAN FOLLOW-UP LETTERS) [20 minutes]

[If needed: These could be things like the NHIS Process FactSheet, Quickstats Booklet, Key Findings Booklet, NHIS In The News postcard, NHIS How to Get Food Help, etc.)

Current Use:

When you approach a household for the first time, what materials do you have ready for use during your introduction? Does it vary depending on what you observe as you approach?

What about when you approach a house after the first time, is there anything you do differently?

If you cannot make contact with the household resident, do you leave materials for the resident? If yes, what materials do you leave? How do you leave them? If not, are there materials that you wish you had to leave behind?

Are you currently supplied with a plastic bag or some other container for holding materials that you could hang over the doorknob? If not, how do you leave your materials behind? Do you have suggestions for a better way to leave materials behind?

If a respondent seems hesitant, do you use any materials to help get the respondent to do the interview? (If needed: Do you use any of the materials during the interview?)

After the interview, are there any materials you use as you are leaving a respondent's home? Do you leave a Thank You letter behind, or is that mailed?

Has any of this interaction with respondents and materials changed over time? How has it changed? Why has it changed?

Overall, do you think the respondent materials help or hurt your interactions with respondents? (If needed: Can you tell me more about that?)

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS [30 minutes]

Current use:

We offer several letters that are associated with specific scenarios, for example, a refusal letter for refusals, a no one home letter for cases where no one is home, etc. How well do you feel these letters match their intended scenario?

(if needed: Are there any particular letters that you feel do not match well or are ineffective for their intended scenario? Are there any scenarios that you wish had an associated letter that is not currently available?)

How do you currently use the letters? What prompts you to request that a follow-up letter be sent to a case?

(In what situations do you usually request a follow-up letter be sent? Are there situations where you find sending the follow-up letter isn't helpful?)

How often do you request that a letter be sent to a case?

What letter or letters do you request the most? For what reasons?

Are there any specific letters that you find unhelpful, or any that you do not request?

(If needed: Can you tell me more about why you don't request that letter?)

How often do respondents reach out to you after receiving a letter? (If needed: as opposed to you having to recontact the respondent)?

How often are you able to convert cases after sending follow up letters?

Can you recall times when a respondent mentioned the follow-up letter without prompting or referred to specific text from a letter? [IF YES] Tell me more about that.

(If time allows: Do respondents ever mention feeling motivated by these letters?)

How important is the method of shipping for follow up letters? Does it matter whether its USPS or FedEx?

How easy or difficult did you find the process for requesting follow-up letters from the ROs? How would you improve it?

Future use:

What letters do you wish were available for FRs to request that are not currently used in the NHIS?

Are there letters or materials you know of from other Census surveys that you work on that you wish the NHIS used?

(If needed: If you work on more than just NHIS, are there any materials or approaches that another survey has that you think would work on NHIS?)

What ideas do you have for improving current NHIS forms and materials?

What additional materials would help you in the field?

(If needed: What message do you think would be most helpful when working with respondents?)

What logo, the CDC or the Census Bureau logo, do you think would be most useful in gaining respondent cooperation through our letters?

(If needed: Do you notice differences in how respondents react to mentions of the CDC and to the Census Bureau? Which reaction is more positive? How often do respondents express confusion about which agency, the Census Bureau or the CDC, is conducting the NHIS?)

SAMPLE ADULT LETTER [5 minutes]

There is currently a letter that is not in use yet, but is being developed, that is geared towards the sample adult. I will share my screen now to give you a chance to read through it before I ask for your thoughts.

[SHARE SCREEN WITH SAMPLE ADULT LETTER]

How useful do you find the Sample Adult Letter as is?

Is there anything in the text or design of the letter that you would change?

Other ideas [5 minutes]

Have you ever worked on a survey that had a “fun fact” on the back of the advance letter envelope to help interest respondents in opening and reading the letter?

If yes, did respondents ever mention it, to say it either prompted or discouraged them to open the envelope?

Have you ever worked on a survey that sent postcards to sampled addresses, alerting them of the upcoming advance letter and instructing them to open it when it arrived?

If yes, did respondents ever mention them, to say they either prompted or discouraged them to open the envelope?

MONETARY INCENTIVE [5 minutes] [IF TIME ALLOWS]

Have you ever worked on a survey that offered a monetary incentive to respondents? If so, what was the amount of the incentive? How and when was the incentive given to respondents (for example, as a gift card mailed ahead of time, or a gift code emailed after the interview)?

Did you find the incentive effective in gaining respondent cooperation?

What do you think about this approach on the survey you worked on? Is there anything you would do differently?

Wrapping Up [5 mins]

1. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us that you haven't had a chance to mention yet?

- a. Anyone else?
2. [ASK OBSERVERS] Do you have any other questions for the FRs?

Thank you very much for your time! The feedback that you shared was very helpful. We've been taking careful notes so we can make updates to the materials.

Appendix B: FS Moderator's Guide

FS Feedback on NHIS Materials Use

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RULES

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- **First, I will be asking a lot of questions.** There are no right or wrong answers to my questions; we just want your honest opinions. We don't need to have everyone agree. In fact, if you have a view different from others it is especially important for us to hear it because you may be the only person who is representing a different point of view here today.
- **Be respectful of other's people comments.** It is fine to disagree with each other's comments. We are interested in listening to everybody's opinion in a respectful manner.
- **Please keep respondents' information confidential.** This means that if you want to tell us about any experiences that you had administering the survey to a respondent, please don't share respondents' names or any other information that could identify a respondent. Please also keep each other's comments confidential after this focus group as well.
- **Only one person speaks at a time and we'd like everyone to get a turn.** Please do not speak while somebody else is talking because it's hard to understand when too many people talk at once. Please speak up and let us know what you are thinking. If you are the type of person who always participates, please give a chance to others to talk.
- Due to **limited time**, I must move the discussion along and may sometimes have to interrupt in order to do so. Please do not be offended. If you have anything else that you'd like to share with us that you did not have time to say, please send your feedback in an email to fld.nhis.questions@census.gov.
- Please turn off your phone and put it away before we begin, and avoid any sort of multitasking like working, browsing the internet, etc.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

ICEBREAKER

The first thing I want to do is get to know each of you a little better. Let's go around the room and have each one of you tell us briefly:

- Your first name
- How long you've been working as an FS

- What you like to do in your free time

I'll go first. My name is... [BE BRIEF SO WE CAN GET THROUGH EVERYONE]

Please feel free to jump in and introduce yourself.

[SINCE THIS IS A POPCORN STYLE OF INTRODUCTIONS MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.]

PROBES

Thank you for telling us a little more about you. Now we are going to start by talking about respondent materials that are used in the field. We will talk about follow-up letters a little bit later. Please let us know what you are hearing from FRs.

RESPONDENT MATERIALS (OTHER THAN FOLLOW-UP LETTERS) [20 minutes]

[If needed: These could be things like the NHIS Process FactSheet, Quickstats Booklet, Key Findings Booklet, NHIS In The News postcard, NHIS How to Get Food Help, etc.)

Current Use:

When an FR approaches a household for the first time, what materials do they have ready for use during their introduction?

What about when an FR approaches a house after the first time, is there anything they do differently depending on what they observe as they approach?

If they cannot make contact with the household resident, do they leave materials for the resident?

If yes, what materials do they leave? How do they leave them?

If not, are there materials that they or you with they had to leave behind?

Are FRs currently supplied with a plastic bag or some other container for holding materials that they can hang over the doorknob?

If not, how do they leave their materials behind? Do you have suggestions for a better way to leave materials behind?

If a respondent seems hesitant, do FRs use any materials to help get the respondent to do the interview? (If needed: Do they use any of the materials during the interview?)

After the interview, are there any materials FRs use as they are leaving a respondent's home?

Has any of this interaction with respondents and materials changed over time? How has it changed? Why has it changed?

Overall, do you think the respondent materials help or hurt interactions with respondents? (If needed: Can you tell me more about that?)

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS [30 minutes]

Current use:

We offer several letters that are associated with specific scenarios, for example, refusal letter for refusals, no one home letter for cases where no one is home, etc. How well do you feel these letters match their intended scenario?

(if needed: Are there any particular letters that you feel do not match well or are ineffective for their intended scenario? Are there any scenarios that you wish had an associated letter that is not currently available?)

How do FRs currently use the letters? What prompts an FR to request a follow-up letter be sent to a case?

(In what situations do FRs usually request a follow-up letter be sent? Are there situations where sending the follow-up letter isn't helpful?)

How often do FRs request a letter sent to a case?

What letter or letters are requested the most? For what reasons?

Are there any specific letters that you believe are unhelpful?

(If needed: Can you tell me more about that?)

How often are FRs able to convert cases after sending follow up letters?

How important is the method of shipping for follow up letters? Does it matter whether its USPS or FedEx?

Do you have any ideas for improving the process for requesting follow-up letters from the ROs?

Future use:

What letters do you wish were available for FRs to request that are not currently used in the NHIS?

Are there letters or materials from other Census surveys that you work on that you wish the NHIS used?

(If needed: If you work on more than just NHIS, are there any materials or approaches that another survey has that you think would work on NHIS?)

What ideas do you have for improving current NHIS forms and materials?

What additional materials would help your FRs in the field?

(If needed: What message/s do you think would be most helpful when working with respondents?)

What logo, the CDC or the Census Bureau logo, would be most useful in gaining respondent cooperation through our letters?

(If needed: Do you notice differences in how respondents react to the CDC and to the Census Bureau? Which reaction is more positive? How often do respondents express confusion about which agency, the Census Bureau or the CDC, is conducting the NHIS?)

SAMPLE ADULT LETTER [10 minutes]

How useful do you find the Sample Adult Letter as is?

Is there anything in the text of the letter that you would change?

Other ideas

How do you encourage or support your FRs to make first contact in the first week of the month? What tools do you with you had to help them achieve this for all their cases?

MONETARY INCENTIVE [10 minutes] [IF TIME ALLOWS]

Have you had any experience managing respondent incentives? For example, have you had any experience with activating debit cards in response to events that occur in the field (for example, contact between an FR and a household resident, or starting an interview), or with emailing or mailing incentives in the form of gift card codes?

If yes, what lessons have you learned from this experience?

Wrapping Up [5 mins]

3. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us that you haven't had a chance to mention yet?
 - b. Anyone else?
4. [ASK OBSERVERS] Do you have any other questions for the FSs?

Thank you very much for your time! The feedback that you shared was very helpful. We've been taking careful notes so we can make updates to the materials.

Appendix C: RSM Moderator's Guide

RSM Feedback on NHIS Materials Use

Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Date: ____/____/____

Start time: _____ AM / PM

Moderators: _____

Mode: In-person Remote—audio only Remote—audio/video

INTRODUCTION [15 mins intro-to icebreaker]

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [MODERATOR NAME] and I will be guiding today's conversation. I work for the Census Bureau in the Center for Behavioral Science Methods [IF REMOTE: and I'm actually talking to you all today from [LOCATION]]. We have a couple of other people listening to our conversation today and helping me take notes so that we don't miss anything important that you say. We'll also be recording our session today so we can make sure to get all your feedback. Myself and the other people working on the project are sworn to protect your confidentiality. Only those working on this project and those who have been sworn to protect your confidentiality may view or listen to the recordings of this group.

I sent you all the privacy notice via email. Does anyone have any questions about that or any concerns? [ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.] Great, I'll go ahead and turn the recording on now. ****TURN ON RECORDERS**** I'm going to ask each person to confirm that they've read the notice and give consent to be recorded for this focus group. _____, can you confirm that? [WAIT FOR PERSON TO SAY YES. ASK EACH PERSON TO CONFIRM.]

We really appreciate that you are taking this time out of your day to share your feedback with us. You are our eyes and ears for this survey and you know what worked well and what didn't work well, so thank you for being here.

We have a few goals today. First, we'd like to hear from you about the respondent materials. Second, we'd like your ideas about followup letters and their use in the field. Finally, we would like to hear from you about other letters, and experiences you've had with respondents.

- **Also on the call is [ASSISTANT NAME]. (S)he is my colleague from [AGENCY] and will also help me with today's conversation.**
- **[If necessary] Joining the call just as observers to learn about your experience are staff from NCHS and Census HQ. The observers are also sworn to protect your confidentiality.**

RULES

Before we get started, I just want to mention a few basic rules.

- **First, I will be asking a lot of questions.** There are no right or wrong answers to my questions; we just want your honest opinions. We don't need to have everyone agree. In fact, if you have a view different from others it is especially important for us to hear it because you may be the only person who is representing a different point of view here today.
- **Be respectful of other's people comments.** It is fine to disagree with each other's comments. We are interested in listening to everybody's opinion in a respectful manner.
- **Please keep respondents' information confidential.** This means that if you want to tell us about any experiences that you had administering the survey to a respondent, please don't share respondents' names or any other information that could identify a respondent. Please also keep each other's comments confidential after this focus group as well.
- **Only one person speaks at a time and we'd like everyone to get a turn.** Please do not speak while somebody else is talking because it's hard to understand when too many people talk at once. Please speak up and let us know what you are thinking. If you are the type of person who always participates, please give a chance to others to talk.
- Due to **limited time**, I must move the discussion along and may sometimes have to interrupt in order to do so. Please do not be offended. If you have anything else that you'd like to share with us that you did not have time to say, please send your feedback in an email to fld.nhis.questions@census.gov.
- Please turn off your phone and put it away before we begin, and avoid any sort of multitasking like working, browsing the internet, etc.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

ICEBREAKER

The first thing I want to do is get to know each of you a little better. Let's go around the room and have each one of you tell us briefly:

- Your first name

- How long you've been working as an [RSM]
- What do you like to do in your free time

I'll go first. My name is... [BE BRIEF SO WE CAN GET THROUGH EVERYONE]

Please feel free to jump in and introduce yourself.

[SINCE THIS IS A POPCORN STYLE OF INTRODUCTIONS MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.]

PROBES

Thank you for telling us a little more about you. Now we are going to start by talking about respondent materials that are used in the field other than follow-up letters; we will talk about those a little bit later.

RESPONDENT MATERIALS (OTHER THAN FOLLOW-UP LETTERS) [10 minutes]

[If needed: These could be things like the NHIS Process FactSheet, Quickstats Booklet, Key Findings Booklet, NHIS In The News postcard, NHIS How to Get Food Help, etc.]

Current Use:

Is there anything you are hearing about from FSs and FRs about the current materials that would be helpful for us to know?

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS [30 minutes]

Current use:

We offer several letters that are associated with specific scenarios, for example, refusal letter for refusals, no one home letter for cases where no one is home, etc. Are you familiar with these letters?

[IF YES] How well do you feel these letters match their intended scenario?

(if needed: Are there any particular letters that you feel do not match well or are ineffective for their intended scenario? Are there any scenarios that you wish had an associated letter that is not currently available?)

In general, do you consider the follow-up letters to be helpful?

From your perspective, how does the field staff currently use the letters? What prompts a request for a follow-up letter to be sent to a case?

Are there any specific letters that you believe are unhelpful?

(If needed: Can you tell me more about that?)

How important is the method of shipping for follow up letters? Does it matter whether it is USPS or FedEx?

When cases are reassigned, has the inclusion of the FR name on the letter caused any problems?

Do you have any ideas for improving the process for requesting follow-up letters from the ROs?

Future use:

What letters do you wish were available for FRs to request that are not currently used in the NHIS?

Are there letters or materials on other Census surveys that you are aware of that you wish the NHIS used?

What ideas do you have for improving current NHIS forms and materials?

What additional materials do you think would help FRs in the field?

(If needed: What message do you think would be most helpful when working with respondents?)

Are there letters covering a specific topic that you wish were available?

(If needed: Are there materials that we don't currently have but you wish we had?)

SAMPLE ADULT LETTER [15 minutes]

Are you familiar with the Sample Adult Letter?

[IF NOT, SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

[IF YES]

Do you think the Sample Adult Letter will be useful as is?

Is there anything on the text of the letter that you would change?

MONETARY INCENTIVE [15 minutes]

Have you had any experience managing respondent incentives? For example, have you had any experience with activating debit cards in response to events that occur in the field (for example, contact between an FR and a household resident, or starting an interview), or with emailing incentives in the form of gift card codes?

[IF YES] How well did the methods work? What lessons have you learned from that experience?

Wrapping Up [5 mins]

5. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us that you haven't had a chance to mention yet?
 - c. Anyone else?

6. [ASK OBSERVERS] Do you have any other questions for the RSMs?

Thank you very much for your time! The feedback that you shared was very helpful. We've been taking careful notes so we can make updates to the materials.

Appendix D: Sample Adult Letter



National Center for Health Statistics

Date: _____

Dear _____

Hello! My name is _____

I am a U.S. Census Bureau Field Representative, and I will visit your household again soon.

I am happy to visit whenever is best for you: mornings, afternoons, evenings, or weekends.

Please call me today to schedule your appointment:

Here's why:

Your household was chosen to participate in the National Health Interview Survey, or NHIS, our nation's gold standard health survey. In the NHIS, one adult per household is randomly selected to be interviewed about their own health. The interview is confidential. **In your household, you were selected.**

You can learn more about the NHIS from the materials left in your household and here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/participant.htm>.

You are important. You cannot be replaced.

NHIS's high quality data inform decisions about where to spend tax dollars. By taking part in the NHIS, you help ensure resources aren't wasted and your community leaders have the guidance they need to help you and your loved ones stay healthy.

Please call me today. Your appointment can be any time before _____

Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't another adult in your household tell us about *their* health?

- Different people in a household have different health and health care needs
- We rely on random selection to ensure our results represent the whole country
- If we only interviewed whoever was first available, our national estimates would not be correct

Why can't another adult in your household tell us about *your* health?

- Only you know exactly how and how much your health impacts your daily life.
- Family members don't know as much as they think they do about how you feel and what you think.
- Even when your family knows about your health, they don't answer questions the same way you would
- If we collected second-hand information, our data would not be as accurate.