

Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology  
Subcommittee on Questionnaire Evaluation

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Subcommittee Member  
US Bureau of Labor Statistics

# Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology

- FCSM is an interagency committee dedicated to improving the quality of Federal statistics
- Sponsored by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- FCSM members are the heads of the named federal statistical agencies
- The FCSM works closely with the Interagency Council for Statistical Policy (ICSP)

# US Principal Statistical Agencies

- Bureau of Economic Analysis
- Bureau of Justice Statistics
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Bureau of Transportation Statistics
- Census Bureau
- Economic Research Service, Dept of Agriculture
- Energy Information Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Internal Revenue Service, Statistics of Income
- National Agricultural Statistics Service
- National Center for Education Statistics
- National Center for Health Statistics
- National Center for Science and Engineering (NSF)
- Social Security Administration, Office of Policy

# FCSM: Question Evaluation Methodology Subcommittee

- Although OMB's Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys state that questions should be evaluated, the document contains no guidance on how to evaluate questions
- Subcommittee outcomes:
  1. Inventory of current agency practices
  2. Inventory of question evaluation methods
  3. Guidelines or best practices for selected methods

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- National Science Foundation, Science Resources Statistics
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# Inventory of Agency Practices

- Identify current practices for question evaluation within the federal statistical system
  - Inventory of the current policies and practices
  - Used to focus guideline development

# Agency Inventory Results

How often is question evaluation preformed?

- New surveys, new supplements or new questions are almost always evaluated
- Existing surveys and questions are less frequently (re)evaluated

# Agency Inventory Results (2)

Does your agency have a policy for question evaluation?

- 3 of 8 agencies have written policies, of varying specificity
- 2 others have informal policies
- The rest had informal expectations or traditions
- Most policies focused on evaluation of new data collection efforts

# Agency Inventory Results (3)

- Behavior coding
- Focus groups
- Bridge studies
- Pilot tests
- Card sorts
- Record-keeping studies
- Cognitive interviews
- Reinterviews
- Edit failures
- Split ballot experiments
- Expert Reviews
- Tracking help desk call
- Ethnographic observations
- Usability studies
- Exploratory interviews/Early stage scoping
- Interviewer or respondent debriefing
- Field tests
- Vignettes

# Inventory of Evaluation Methods

- Agency inventory revealed inconsistencies in the terms used for question evaluation
  - Pilot testing? = Pretesting? = Field testing?
- Group is creating a list of question evaluation methods and a description for each
  - Definition
  - Strengths and Weaknesses
  - Situations where method should be used

# Best Practices for Question Evaluation Methods

- Goal
  - To provide best practices or guidelines for methodologies used for conducting question evaluation studies within the federal statistical system.
- Cognitive interviewing (CI) selected first
  - Commonly used evaluation method across agencies
  - Much already written about CI

# Cognitive Interviewing Best Practices (1)

Requirement for a methodological plan that includes, at a minimum:

- Sampling plan
- Recruitment of respondents
- Location of interviews
- Interview guide
- Plan for iterative testing
- Plan for type of analysis to be conducted

# Cognitive Interviewing Best Practices (2)

## Requirements for analysis of results

- Maintain raw data
  - Recordings or transcripts
- Document synthesis process
  - Interviewer notes to summary notes to groupings to results

# Cognitive Interviewing Best Practices (3)

Requirements for a written final report that provides a description and rationale of the methodological decisions, study findings, and evidence that supports study findings including (but not limited to):

- Study objectives
- Sampling
- Data collection: when, who, where, how
- Analysis methods
- Results
- Study transferability and limitations

# Next Steps

- Methods inventory and CI best practices are currently under development and review
- Proposed documents will be submitted to the FCSM for review and comment
- After revision and concurrence, the package will be shared with the agencies on the Interagency Committee on Statistical Policy (ICSP), for review and comment
- After addressing comments, the proposed documents will be submitted to OMB
- Best practices for other methods may also be developed

# Contact

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