

**CPS Modernization Efforts Webinar Series**  
Tuesday, October 24, 2023

**SCRIPT**

**SLIDE 1: COMING UP: LIVE WEBINAR**

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**SLIDE 3: COMING UP: LIVE WEBINAR**

**SLIDE 4: PLEASE STAND BY FOR LIVE WEBINAR**

**SLIDE 5: VERIZON OPERATOR MESSAGE FOR PARTICIPANTS:**

OPERATOR: *Welcome and thank you for standing by.*

*Because we may address your question through the presentation of material, all participants are currently in a "listen only" mode. There will be a question-and-answer session at the end of today's webinar. At that time, you may press STAR 1 on your phone to ask a question. This webinar is being recorded.*

*I'd now like to turn this conference over to Julie Iriondo, Chief of the Media Relations Branch in the Public Information Office, who will be hosting us through today's presentation. Julie?*

**SLIDE 6: CPS MODERNIZATION WEBINAR SERIES OPEN - INTRODUCTION OF CPS MODERNIZATION**

JULIE: Good afternoon and thank you joining us for today's virtual event. I'm Julie Iriondo, chief of the media Relations Branch in the Public Information Office at the Census Bureau. This morning we announced a joint effort between the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics also known as BLS – to modernize the Current Population Survey and propose plans to implement changes to ensure sustainability. This afternoon's webinar will take a close look at CPS modernization efforts and we'll have time to answer your questions at the end of the presentation.

**SLIDE 7: CPS MODERNIZATION EFFORTS WEBINAR -- INTRODUCTION OF TODAY'S SPEAKERS**

JULIE: For today's webinar, I'm joined by:

Nicholas Johnson, division chief of Labor Force Statistics with BLS ... and Kyra Linse, survey director of the Current Population Survey and American Time Use Survey Team with the Census Bureau

**SLIDE 8: QUESTIONS -- PARTICIPANT CALL IN LINE**

JULIE: Immediately after the presentations, we'll begin taking your questions.

Please note, if you're watching today's webinar on YouTube, you'll need to dial into the phone line to ask a question. That number is listed on your screen now.

And if you already know what you'd like to ask, you can join the phone queue right now. You can do so by dialing STAR One.

Without further ado, I'll now turn it over to Nicholas Johnson, our first presenter. Nicholas?

### **SLIDE 9: CPS MODERNIZATION – INTRODUCTION OF TODAY'S SPEAKERS**

Good afternoon and welcome to the joint Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics webinar on the modernization of the Current Population Survey – the CPS. Thank you all for joining us.

My name is Nicholas Johnson, and I am the CPS Program Manager from BLS. I'll be joined by my Census colleague, Kyra Linse, who is the Survey Director for the CPS.

### **SLIDE 10: AGENDA**

Today, we're going to discuss some early efforts that both agencies are pursuing to help ensure the long-term sustainability of the CPS.

We'll start with some background about how CPS data are collected, discuss current collection challenges, and the need for modernization.

We'll be introducing plans for a self-administered web collection instrument and discuss some broader goals for CPS modernization.

### **SLIDE 11: CPS BACKGROUND**

The CPS is a monthly survey that is jointly sponsored by BLS and the Census Bureau. It serves as the source for key labor force statistics, including the unemployment rate, labor force participation rate, and the employment-population ratio.

The survey includes about 70,000 households per month, of which about 60,000 are eligible for the CPS. Each month, Census field representatives attempt collection either in-person or by telephone for each in-sample household. This occurs over a 10-day collection period each month.

Typically, the first interview is conducted in-person and subsequent interviews are conducted by telephone. The interviews range from 10 – 30 minutes long (including supplements), with the first month typically being the longest. This can vary by the size of the household though.

A particular household will be contacted for 8 months out of a 16-month period, with 4 months on, followed by an 8-month break, and finishing with 4 more months on.

### **SLIDE 12: CURRENT COLLECTION CHALLENGES**

The CPS response rate has been declining since 2013. There was an initial period in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic when collection operations were disrupted, but even as collection returned to

normal, the pace of response rate decline accelerated. In 10 years, response rates have gone from about 90% to about 70%.

Of course, CPS is not alone. This is a challenge faced by nearly every survey, whether in government or the private sector, both here and around the globe.

The additional challenge is that not only are response rates declining, but collection costs are increasing. Labor and travel costs are major components of total collection costs and continue to increase, and with additional contacts needed to reach respondents, the CPS will continue to face headwinds in survey collection.

We are routinely analyzing the survey to monitor its ability to detect meaningful change and ensure representativeness. While the labor force estimates from the CPS remain highly reliable, it's important to recognize that a continuing trend of declining response rates will lead to wider confidence intervals, making it more difficult to detect meaningful changes. And while we haven't yet detected ongoing concerns about the representativeness of the survey, the risk of this will rise with lower response rates.

#### **SLIDE 13: NEED FOR MODERNIZATION**

Both agencies are in strong agreement that work to modernize the survey must begin now in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the CPS. As a first step, we plan to address the trend of declining response rates. To do so, we need to identify ways to reduce respondent burden and reach respondents who are otherwise unwilling to report.

We'll also need to manage survey costs if we're going to be able to maintain existing sample size. To do so, it will be critical to improve our operational data collection efficiencies.

I am going to hand off to Kyra to discuss our initial plans to modernize data collection.

#### **SLIDE 14: DEVELOPMENT OF CPS WEB COLLECTION MODE**

Thanks Nic. I am Kyra Linse from the Census Bureau, and I will be going over our plans for the next few years.

So, we are at the beginning of our efforts to modernize with most of resources going towards introducing a Web Data Collection Mode also known as Internet Self Response.

The goals of this mode are many: To reduce respondent burden by allowing more choices on how and when to answer, reaching respondents who are not interested in interviews with our interviewers, hopefully at least slowing down the growth in costs. We also want our trained interviewers to have more time to focus on cases that are more difficult to get. We hope all of this together will improve response rate and quality for the CPS.

#### **SLIDE 15: PRELIMINARY HIGH-LEVEL TIMELINE OF INTERNET MODE IMPLEMENTATION**

This is a 5 year project that began last year in the initial research, development and testing phase. As this is a survey that feeds a national economic indicator, we want to take the time to review and test as thoroughly as possible while balancing the real life need to get this into the survey production environment as soon as possible. We are taking 2 years for development and smaller testing on survey design to begin. After which we will be moving on to field experiments and field tests. Once we are

satisfied that the testing has not found any major issues and we feel we have a good production plan, we will move onto phasing in this change.

Of course this is the optimal timeline, any findings that need to be addressed before moving on to the next phase in testing will need to be addressed to make the most of each test and thus could delay the schedule. The activities planned for FY 25 – FY 27 are contingent on funding availability, and obviously the final level of appropriations for both agencies will dictate how much of this we can accomplish and the exact timeframes. Testing will be tailored to funding received and may delay the schedule, change the scope, or order of testing.

#### **SLIDE 16: DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING**

We plan on reviewing and testing the new mode for many years. The goal of this testing is three fold.

Of course, the accuracy of the reporting. We want to make sure the respondents understand the questions as worded and can comfortably answer them correctly. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is to make sure the adding of this mode does not accidentally skew the reporting of any estimates. This means comparing responses in testing to production and researching possible mode effects on all processing such as weighting. If a mode effect is determined, then we would want to adjust to minimize those effects as much as possible. We would also want to be able to report to our data users what those effects are. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is to test the best way to implement this mode into the data collection, including contact methods and timing of switching modes.

Based on research so far, we are working on the following for the questionnaire. We are looking to keep the core of CPS the same and are not reevaluating whole questions. Instead, we are reviewing what minor wording changes are needed in order to accommodate self reporting. The exception to this is there are some questions that the interviewer are trained to code based on the respondent answers. We are reviewing how to ask these questions so the respondent can provide enough information for coding after the fact. We are also reviewing the questionnaire in many ways to make sure the respondent can understand the questions without any interviewer help.

#### **SLIDE 17: TYPES OF TESTING**

There are many steps to testing and review. We started with expert reviews of the current survey instrument and identified possible areas of concern based on knowledge from other surveys and other research done in the field.

Census has also developed some standards over the years for some questions and screens. We will incorporate those.

Crowd sourcing is asking questions to a non probability sample of respondents who agree to help with research. We created an online version of the CPS with follow-up questions embedded in the instrument. Two versions were tested of multiple design features. This allowed us to quickly identify problem questions or designs.

Cognitive Testing is a review of the instrument with a respondent who provides background on how they interpreted the questions and why they answered like they did. It is useful to understand the mindset of the respondents so that we can know if they are answering differently then we would expect.

In addition, to identify questions that respondents have naturally needed help with over the years, we did focus groups with our interviewers.

We hope all of these reviews will minimize corrections during field test.

### **SLIDE 18: TYPES OF TESTING**

Usability testing is more about reviewing the mode as a whole. This is monitoring a respondent to see how they answer the questions on their own. The goal is to make sure the Respondent can follow the directions, understand how to answer, and find help as needed. Ease is only good as long as the answers are accurate, so we follow up to make sure the answers they report on their own is the intended answer. In addition, especially for CPS due to it being longitudinal, we want to make sure a respondent can sign into the survey month over month and easily get back in without any barriers.

### **SLIDE 19: TYPES OF TESTING**

All the testing I have described before now is really pre-testing that is part of development. Once we feel we have done our best to eliminate known road blocks and created a plan for best results, it needs to be tested in the field. While we would love to run a completely parallel CPS with the new mode for all testing, that is not realistic due to funding and resources, So we have broken live field test into two components. The first field test will be focused on the experiments involving the web collection mode. The overall goal is to test if the web collection mode will be a successful mode and the best way to support it. We will run experiments on the sample to make decisions we can not make without feedback though data collection. These are things like contact strategies, wording in the instrument, and how to best encourage the uptake of the web collection mode.

After reviewing the results of that test, the 2<sup>nd</sup> test will be a small version of what we think production should look like. Again, we will not have the money, resources and time to do a full parallel production so this will be a smaller sample and a shortened longitudinal test. The goal of this test is to confirm our choices in the design but also to focus on data review for mode effects.

The results of this test will refine what we think will be the best practices. Even then, this is a large change. So, we will not just change over all at once for production. Instead, we plan to phase in the new design and phase out the old design in order to mitigate risk to the data.

If at any point, we don't feel like the data we are collecting though the web collection mode is successful, testing will be paused to attempt to correct the issue before moving on to the next stage. There is always the chance that the web collection mode would not be put into production if we deemed it not appropriate.

### **SLIDE 20: EFFECTS ON ASEC AND SUPPLEMENTS**

This update to CPS also effects our largest supplement the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) along with all of our supplements. All supplements need to be reviewed and transitioned to the web instruments. This is a large lift as we have about 15 active supplements currently. As the goal is to transition CPS as quickly as possible, there may be some impacts on supplements as we transition but we will do our best to minimize those impacts. For ASEC, we are using this transition as a way to do more research beyond just transition to web collection mode. We are also reviewing respondent burden and administrative records. We plan on presenting plans for ASEC and research results from this review as part of this webinar series at a later date.

## **SLIDE 21: CHALLENGES TO INTRODUCE WEB MODE**

We have mentioned a few times now the optimal timeline and one issue is testing could find issues and delay the process, but we wanted to outline what we see as some of the major challenges beyond that.

The first thing of course is the making sure we have the best quality data. Identifying all mode effects can be difficult in smaller samples and often plans to minimize those mode effects need more testing. Due to the tight timeline and resources needed, this will be a challenge to identify mode effects and may require more testing than originally planned to minimize them.

This leads to another major challenge we foresee. These types of ambitious changes have a cost and will be challenging to execute within current appropriated funds. We will need to be flexible with plans based on available funding.

3<sup>rd</sup>, We are timing adding a web collection mode to the availability of a new enterprise data collection system at Census, so the testing and launch are linked to the system development and testing as well.

As for data collection, we see two main challenges. To get respondents to answer web collection mode quickly so we do not need to send interviewers and for respondents to select web collection mode as their preferred mode. This will require our interviews helping promote the web collection mode as the best way to respond.

Now I will hand it back over to Nic.

## **SLIDE 22: MODERNIZATION BEYOND INTERNET**

Thank you, Kyra, for walking us through the initial plans for a CPS web collection instrument.

While plans for modernization are still in the early stages, we know that this effort will extend beyond simply introducing a web collection mode. Both agencies are cooperating to identify other areas of research to improve the survey.

- We will consider the use of adaptive design to more efficiently prioritize cases for collection.
- We will review sampling and weighting design to identify methods to improve the accuracy of the data.
- We will pursue research projects that use administrative data to determine if these sources could increase the accuracy of data or reduce respondent burden.

Census and BLS will continue to work together to identify and review appropriate avenues to modernize the survey and ensure its long-term sustainability.

## **SLIDE 23: FEEDBACK**

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this introduction on our early thoughts for moving forward, and hope that you continue to follow along as these plans continue to develop.

To continue to follow updates as we progress towards a more complete vision for this modernization, please look to the Census and BLS CPS sites. The pages listed on the slide are now available and provide information on the topics we discussed today.

We'd love to hear your feedback, please feel free to reach out to [DEMO.CPS@census.gov](mailto:DEMO.CPS@census.gov).

Thank you, back to you Julie.

#### **SLIDE 24: QUESTIONS:**

Thank you, Nicholas and Kyra. We are now ready to begin taking your questions. Operator, can you please provide instructions on how people can submit their questions?

#### ***{{OPERATOR GIVES INSTRUCTIONS}}***

*If you'd like to ask a question, please dial STAR 1, unmute your phone, and record your name and organization clearly.*

*If you'd like to withdraw your question, dial STAR 2.*

*Again, to ask your question, dial STAR 1. It will take just a few moments for the first question to come through.}}*

#### **SLIDE 25: CPS Modernization Efforts - Release Resources**

JULIE: Thank you, Operator.

- As we wait for the questions to come in, I'd like to highlight a few resources for today's release.
- They can be found via our homepage on CENSUS-DOT-GOV.
- There, you will find a banner that hyperlinks to our newsroom and the CPS Modernization Efforts Press Kit.
- Please note that resources will be added as soon as they are available.
- Ok – we are ready to start taking questions.
- Operator – do we have our first question?

#### **SLIDE 26: QUESTIONS**

JULIE: Operator – do we have our first question?

#### **SLIDE 27: UPCOMING CENSUS BUREAU RELEASES**

JULIE: As we wait for the next question to queue up – I'd like to note some of our upcoming releases.

On November 7, the Census Bureau will offer a two-day embargo for qualified media to access the new Population Projections. These projections provide a comprehensive analysis of the nation's projected population through 2100. Population projections will be released to the public at 12:01am on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

And on December 5th, the Census Bureau will release the 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates under embargo. These estimates provide a wide range of statistics about people and housing for every community in the nation... and are available down to the block level. They will be publicly release at 12:01am on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

More information on these releases and how to qualify for embargo access is available in our newsroom.

**SLIDE 28: QUESTIONS**

JULIE: Operator – do we have our next question?

**SLIDE 29: FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

That will be our final question.

If you have additional questions after today’s webinar, please contact the Public Information Office at 301-763-3030 or email us at [pio@census.gov](mailto:pio@census.gov)

Or if you have more general questions, please contact our Customer Service Center.

And a reminder – you can find resources from today’s webinar in our Press Kit in our newsroom.

**SLIDE 30: THANK YOU (CLOSING)**

This concludes today’s webinar.

I’d like to thank today’s presenters -- Kyra Linse and Nicholas Johnson.

I’m Julie Iriondo – thank you for joining and have a great rest of your day.