

FCSM Subcommittee on Question Evaluation Methodology: An Overview

Jennifer Edgar



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History

- 1995: Paperwork Reduction Act
- 2001: Information Quality Act
- 2002: OMB Guidelines for Ensuring Quality
- 2006: OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys
- 2012: FCSM Subcommittee on Question Evaluation Methodology

PRA

- Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995 requires agencies employ effective and efficient survey methodologies
- PRA also requires OMB to “develop and oversee the implementation of government-side policies and standards concerning statistical collection methods”

Information Quality Act

- In 2001 Congress passed Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for FY2001 the Information Quality Act
- OMB was to give agencies guidelines for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information

2006 OMB Standards

- To assist agencies with their information collections in 2006 OMB published
 - ▶ Guidance on Agency Survey and Statistical Information Collections
 - ▶ Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys

Pretesting is Required

The guidance encourages agencies to conduct

“Testing...as an effective means of refining collections of information...”

The standards state:

“Agencies must ensure that all components of a survey function as intended ... by **conducting a pretest** of the survey components”

Pretesting Guideline

- The Pretesting standard has an accompanying guideline with “recommended best practices to fulfill the goals of the standards.”
- **Guideline 1.4.1:** Test new components of a survey using methods such as cognitive testing, focus groups, and usability testing, prior to a field test of the survey system...

FCSM Subcommittee

To help agencies meet these requirements, the FCSM the chartered the

**Subcommittee on
Question
Evaluation
Methodology**

Subcommittee Membership

- OMB requested representative nominations from statistical agencies represented on
 - ▶ Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP)
 - ▶ FCSM
- Membership varied over the course of the work
 - ▶ Efforts to represent the statistical agencies

Subcommittee Charge

- Inventory how statistical agencies conduct evaluations of their survey questions
- Develop guidelines for conducting such evaluations so as to improve the resulting data quality.

Subcommittee Goals

The charter set out three goals:

1. Produce an inventory of methods used across agencies
2. Identify cognitive interviewing guidelines
3. Assess the feasibility of developing guidelines for other question evaluation methods

Subcommittee Process

- Meetings, meetings and meetings (2012-2014)
- Sub - subcommittees
 1. Agency Inventory
 2. Cognitive Interview Guidelines
- Group review and revisions
- Worked towards consensus
 - ▶ Settled for majority



Agency Inventory Goals

- Inventory current methods within agencies:
 - ▶ Existing question evaluation policy (written or understood)
 - ▶ Factors determining how and how often question evaluation is done
 - ▶ Constraints preventing question evaluation
 - ▶ Resources allocated for question evaluation
 - ▶ Evaluation methods used

Agency Inventory: Findings



We don't all speak the same language!

Agency Inventory: Findings

- Significant differences in terminology used across agencies
 - ▶ Related to the type of evaluation methods generally used
 - ▶ Pretesting = any evaluation method or just Cognitive interviewing?
 - ▶ Field test = Pilot tests or dress rehearsals?



Agency Inventory → Methods Inventory



Realized that we needed to start with a
consistent set of definitions

Methods Inventory

- Subcommittee replaced the original agency inventory with a inventory of evaluation methods
- Goal was to allow agencies to understand evaluation terms consistently
 - ▶ *Maybe* even start to use consistent language

Cognitive Interviewing Guidelines

- The subcommittee was also asked to develop guidelines for cognitive interviewing (CI)
 - ▶ CI is a commonly used evaluation method
 - ▶ While empirical research on 'best practices' is still needed, much is known about how to conduct CIs
 - ▶ Experienced CI researchers identified recommendations to help agencies conduct sound CI studies

3. Other Best Practices

- The team had a third goal of developing guidelines for other methods
 - ▶ The membership of the subcommittee lacked the expertise in other methods
 - ▶ Additional teams could be created to tap into the considerable knowledge within the statistical agencies to develop guidelines for other methods



Next Steps

- The Methods Inventory and CI Guidelines are under review
- OMB will determine next steps for review and how these documents will be issued

Subcommittee Members

- Benjamin Bridgeman, BEA
- Lionel Deang, SSA
- Jennifer Edgar, BLS
- Scott Fricker, BLS
- Patricia Goerman, Census
- Joanne Hsu, FRB
- Kashka Kubzdela, NCES
- Jaki McCarthy, NASS
- Kristen Miller, NCHS
- Rebecca Morrison, NSF
- Cleo Redline, NCES
- Paul Scanlon, NCHS
- Kristin Stettler, Census
- Diane Willimack, Census
- Stephanie Wilson, NCHS
- Mark Xu, BEA
- Chair: Jennifer Madans, NCHS