

# Employing Behavioral Insights to Entice Response to the American Community Survey

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European Survey Research Association  
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U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU  
[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

*This presentation is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. Any views expressed on statistical, methodological, operational, or technical issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.*

# Outline

- ACS Data Collection and Mail Contact Strategy
- Objectives of ACS Mail Materials Research
- Learning from Behavior Insights
- Recent Research
  - Including a data slide
  - Revising current mail materials
  - Developing new mail materials
- Next Steps


# The American Community Survey

*The American Community Survey is on the leading edge of survey design, continuous improvement, and data quality*

- The nation's most current, reliable, and accessible data source for local statistics on critical planning topics such as age, children, veterans, commuting, education, income, and employment
- Surveys **3.5 million** addresses and informs over **\$675 billion** of Federal government spending each year
- Covers **40+ topics**, supports over **300** evidence-based Federal government uses, and produces **11 billion** estimates each year

13199013

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

 **THE American Community Survey**

This booklet shows the content of the American Community Survey questionnaire.

**Start Here**

Respond online today at:  
<https://respond.census.gov/acs>  
OR  
Complete this form and mail it back as soon as possible.

This form asks for information about the people who are living or staying at the address on the mailing label and about the house, apartment, or mobile home located at the address on the mailing label.

**Please print today's date.**  
Month  Day  Year

**Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form.** We will only contact you if needed for official Census Bureau business.  
Last Name   
First Name  MI   
Area Code + Number  -

**How many people are living or staying at this address?**


- **INCLUDE** everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months.
- **INCLUDE** yourself if you are living here for more than 2 months.
- **INCLUDE** anyone else staying here who does not have another place to stay, even if they are here for 2 months or less.
- **DO NOT INCLUDE** anyone who is living somewhere else for more than 2 months, such as a college student living away or someone in the Armed Forces on deployment.

Number of people

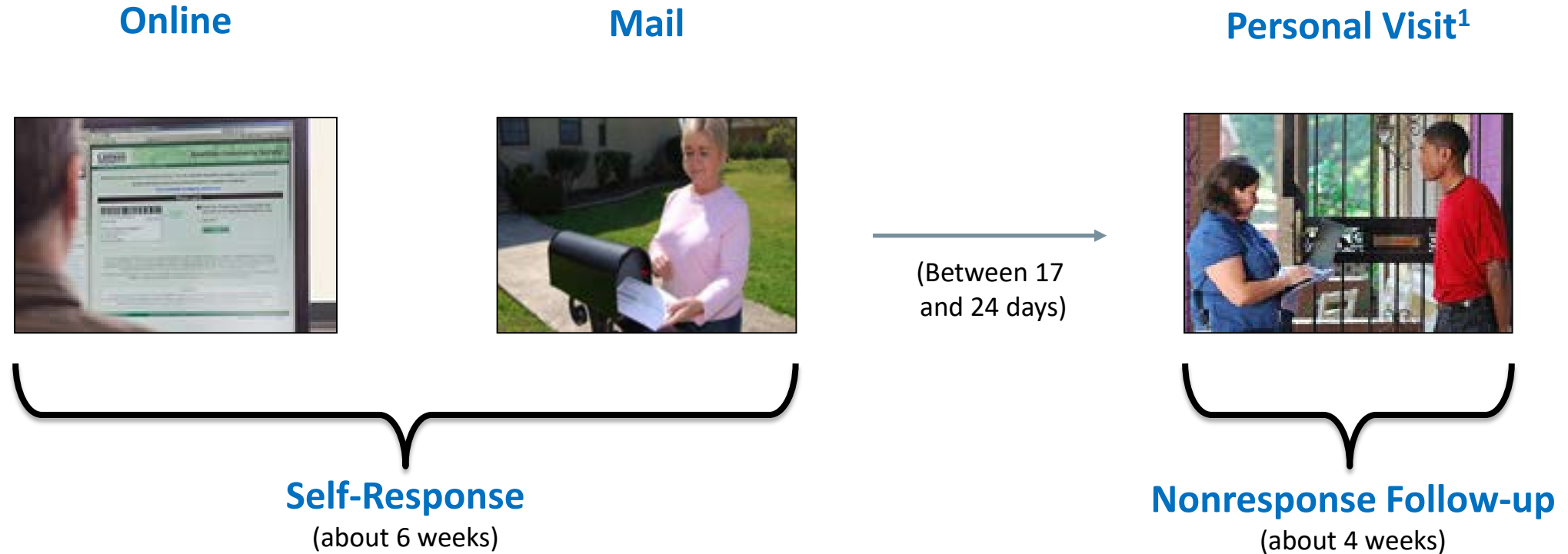
**Fill out pages 2, 3, and 4 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address for more than 2 months. Then complete the rest of the form.**

FORM **ACS-1(INFO)(2019)**  
OMB No. 0607-0810  
OMB No. 0607-0936

INFORMATION COPY

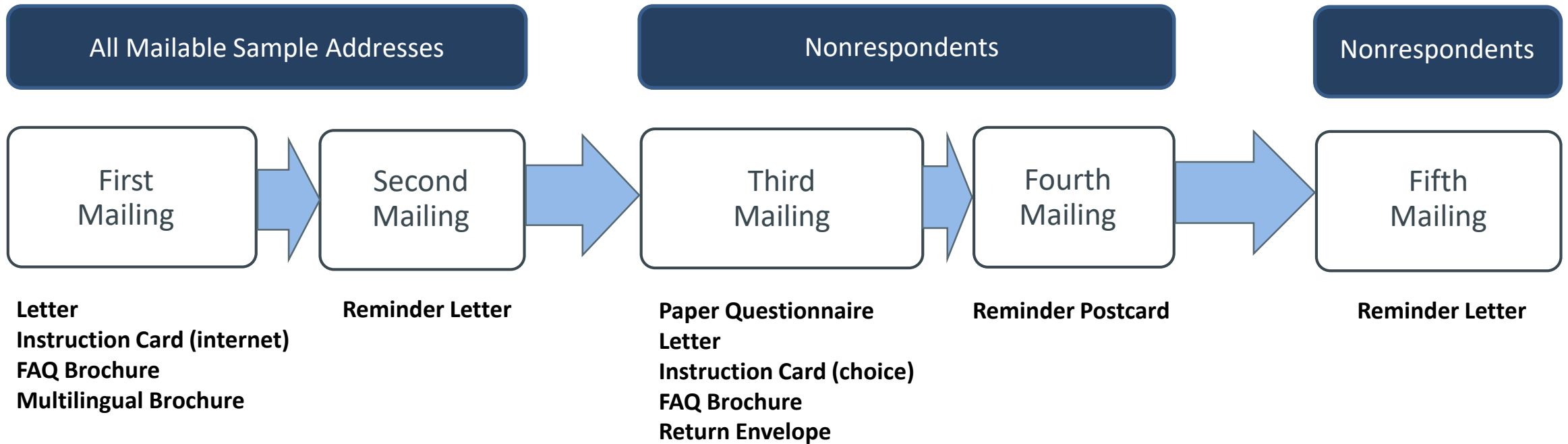


# ACS Data Collection Process



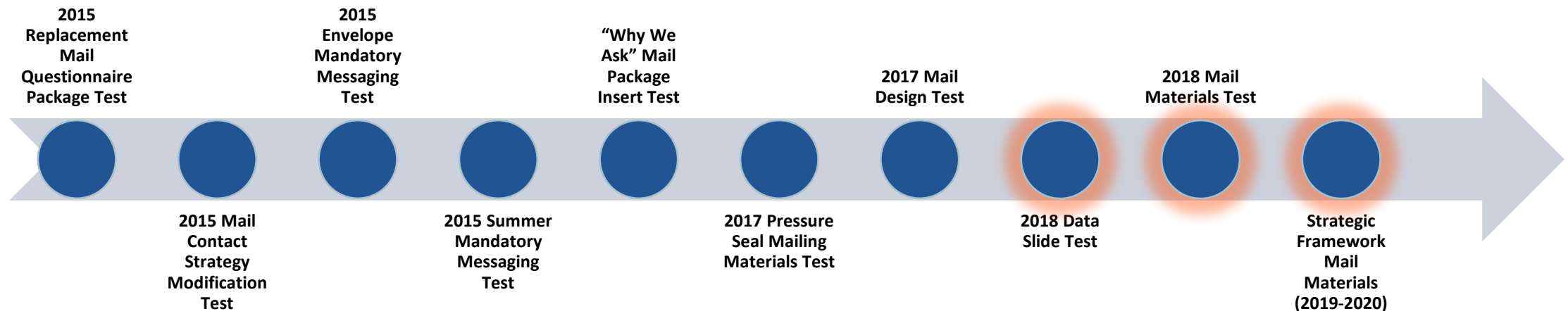
<sup>1</sup> The Personal Visit is conducted via Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI).

# ACS Self-Response Mail Contact Strategy



# ACS Mail Materials Research Objectives

- Improve self-response rates through streamlined materials
- Address respondents' and stakeholders' concerns about the prominent nature of mandatory messages on the mail materials

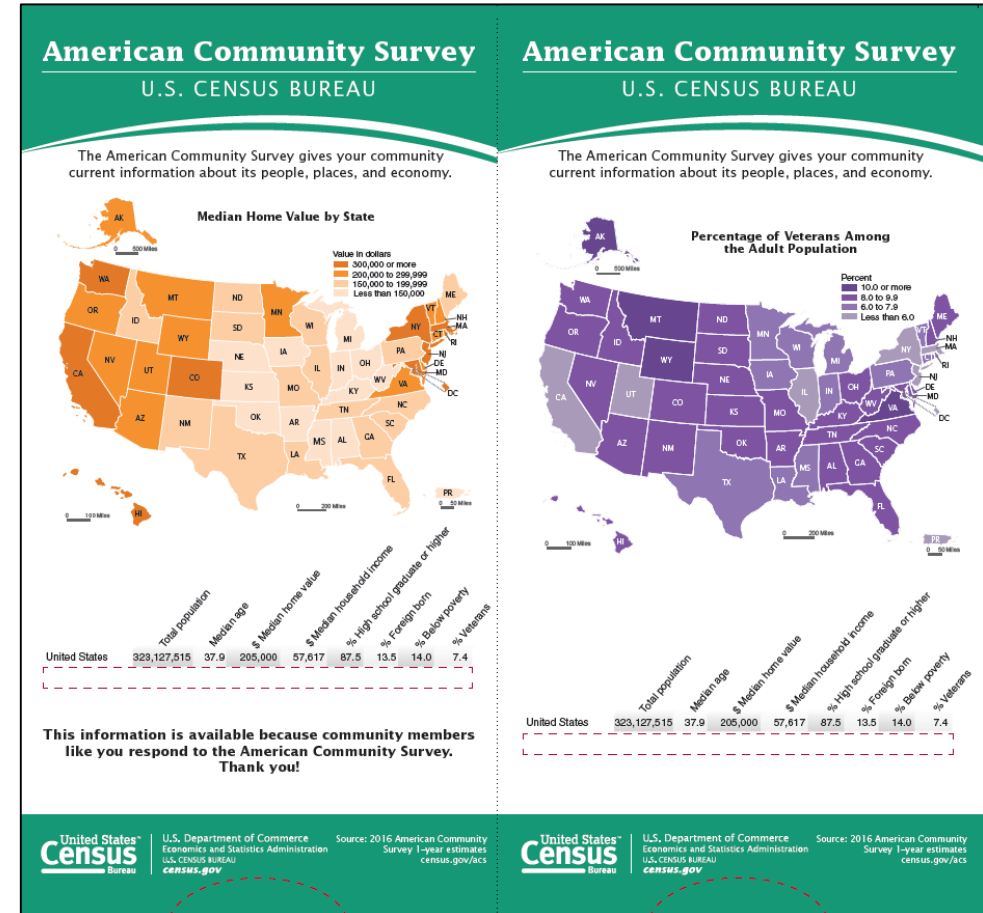


# Learning from Behavioral Insights

- Reviewed research in the fields of Communications, Social Psychology, Behavioral Economics, and Survey Methodology
- Combined insights to build a strategic framework for improving ACS mail materials
  - Establish credibility and trust
  - Two-way communication
  - Audience-based messaging
  - Communicate benefits
  - Personalization
  - Communicate norms

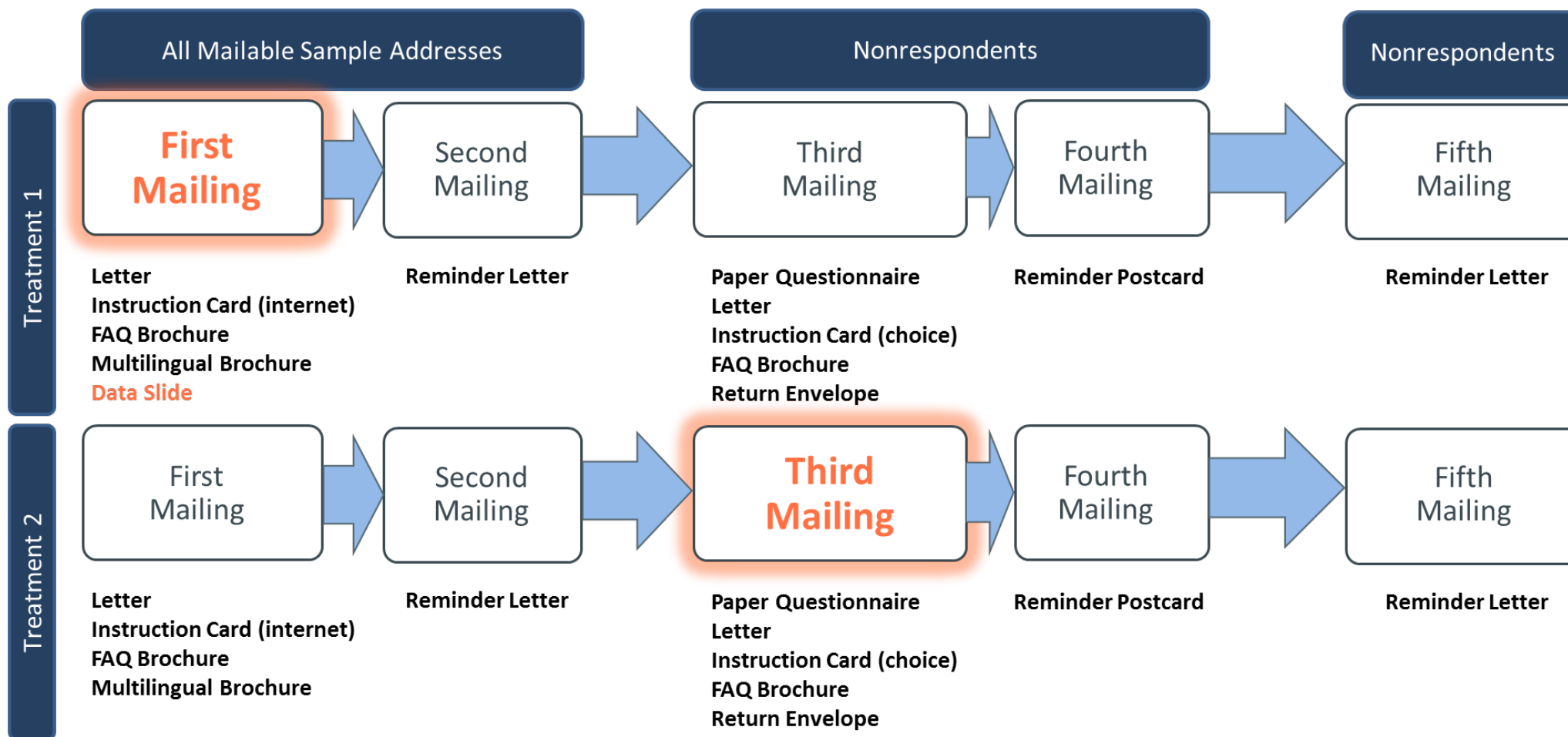
# 2018 Data Slide Test

- Establish credibility and trust:
  - Attach the ACS to the Census Bureau brand
  - This could lend legitimacy to the survey request
- Communicate benefits:
  - Messages that convey community-level benefits of ACS participation are viewed favorably
  - This could overcome respondent concerns about sharing sensitive information





# Incorporating the Data Slide into Mail Materials



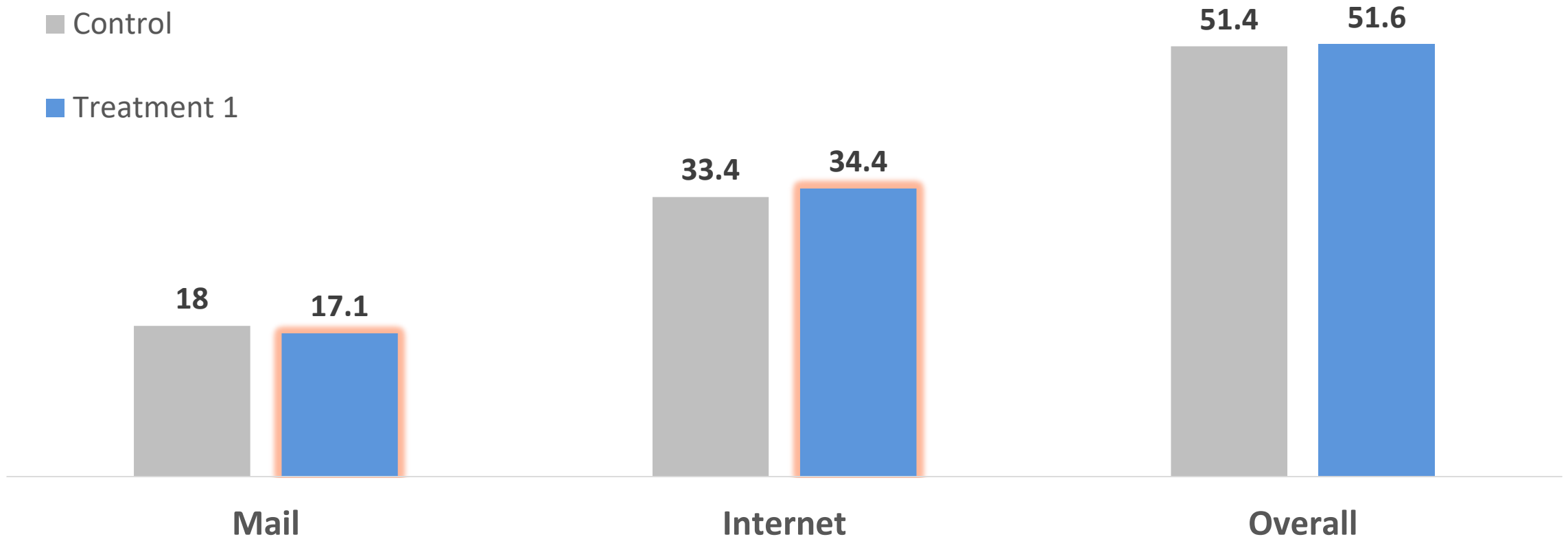
# Self-Response Rate Results: Treatment 1

(Analysis of All Addresses Sent the Initial Mailing)

Percent with a Return Received before CAPI

■ Control

■ Treatment 1



Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

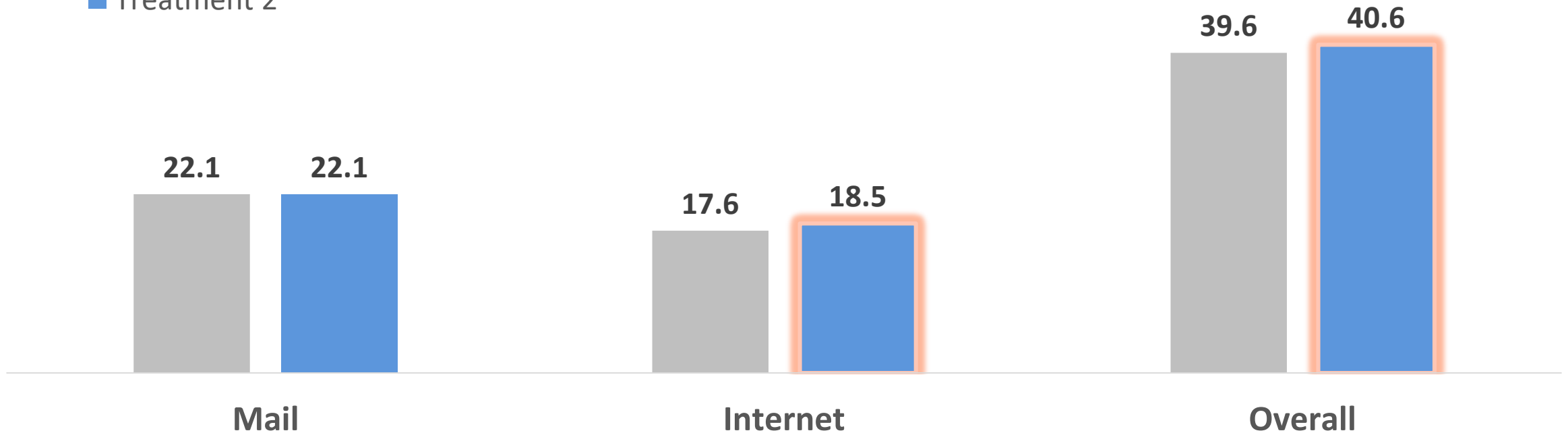
# Self-Response Rate Results: Treatment 2

(Analysis only of Addresses Sent the Paper Questionnaire)

Percent with a Return before CAPI

■ Control

■ Treatment 2



Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

# 2018 Data Slide Test: Findings

- Sending data slide in mailing 1 (Treatment 1)
  - Overall self-response rates were not different
  - Treatment 1 had a higher internet response rate and lower mail response rate
- Sending data slide in mailing 3 (Treatment 2)
  - Treatment 2 had higher self-response
  - Treatment 2 had higher internet response

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

Continue to explore changes to mandatory messaging and improvements to mail materials including:

- Emphasizing the Census Bureau brand
- Using visual design principles to draw attention to key messages
- Employing plain language principles to make the letters easier to read
- Streamlining the mail materials
- Revising the questionnaire cover
- Including the text “Open Immediately” on the envelope

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Emphasizing the Census Bureau Brand, Using Visual Design Principles, and Employing Plain Language Principles*

### Current ACS Production

ACS-13(L)(2017)  
(6-2017)

 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

A message from the Director, U.S. Census Bureau ...

Your household has been randomly selected to complete a very important national survey, the American Community Survey. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts this survey to give our country an up-to-date picture of how we live—our education, employment, housing, and more. Using the enclosed instructions, please complete the survey online as soon as possible at:

<https://respond.census.gov/acs>

The Census Bureau is using the Internet to collect this information in an effort to conserve natural resources, save taxpayers' money, and process your data more efficiently. If you are unable to complete the survey online, there is no need to contact us. We will send you a paper questionnaire in a few weeks.


This survey collects critical information used to meet the needs of communities across the United States. For example, results from this survey are used to decide where new schools, hospitals, and fire stations are needed. This information also helps communities plan for the kinds of emergency situations that might affect you and your neighbors, such as floods and other natural disasters.

The Census Bureau chose your address, not you personally, as part of a randomly selected sample. You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey. The U.S. Census Bureau is required by law to keep your information confidential. The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data. The enclosed brochures answer frequently asked questions about the survey.


If you need help completing the survey, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you.

Enclosures

### Revised Letter

 U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233

A message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau:

Your address has been randomly selected by the U.S. Census Bureau to participate in the **American Community Survey**. The Census Bureau conducts this survey each year to give our country an up-to-date picture of how we live—including our education, housing, and jobs.

Communities across the country rely on information from this survey to decide where important services are needed, including:

- Improving roads and reducing traffic
- Building schools
- Planning for the health care needs of the elderly

Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/acs>

**Your response is required by U.S. law.** Because your household has been asked to participate on behalf of your community, it is vital that you complete this survey to help meet critical needs in your area.



**If you are unable to complete the survey online, we will send you a paper questionnaire in a few weeks.** The Census Bureau is using the internet to collect this information to conserve natural resources, save taxpayers' money, and process data more efficiently.

If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you in advance for your prompt response.

Enclosures

American Community Survey data help determine the annual distribution of more than **\$675 billion** in federal funds to communities nationwide.

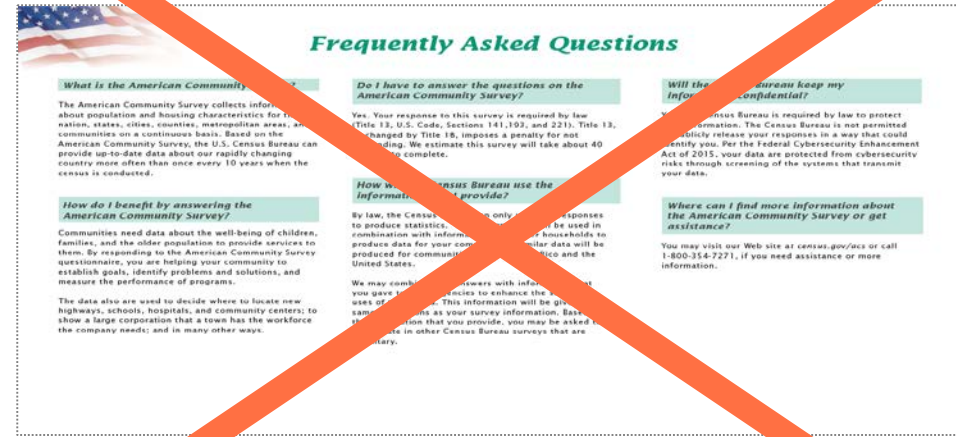
# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Streamlining the Mail Materials*

### Instruction Card



### FAQ




# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## Revising Questionnaire Cover

### Production Questionnaire

13187017

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



## THE American Community Survey

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**Start Here**

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<https://respond.census.gov/acs>

OR

Complete this form and mail it back as soon as possible.

This form asks for information about the people who are living or staying at the address on the mailing label and about the house, apartment, or mobile home located at the address on the mailing label.

**If you need help or have questions about completing this form,** please call 1-800-354-7271. The telephone call is free.

**Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD):**  
Call 1-800-662-8330. The telephone call is free.

**¿NECESITA AYUDA?** Si usted habla español y necesita ayuda para completar su cuestionario, llame sin cargo alguno al 1-877-833-5623. Usted también puede completar su entrevista por teléfono con un entrevistador que habla español. O puede responder por Internet en: <https://respond.census.gov/acs>

For more information about the American Community Survey, visit our web site at: <http://www.census.gov/acs>

**➔ Please print today's date.**  
Month  Day  Year

**➔ Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form.** We will only contact you if needed for official Census Bureau business.

Last Name

First Name  MI

Area Code + Number  -

**➔ How many people are living or staying at this address?**

- **INCLUDE** everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months.
- **INCLUDE** yourself if you are living here for more than 2 months.
- **INCLUDE** anyone else staying here who does not have another place to stay, even if they are here for 2 months or less.
- **DO NOT INCLUDE** anyone who is living somewhere else for more than 2 months, such as a college student living away or someone in the Armed Forces on deployment.

Number of people

**➔ Fill out pages 2, 3, and 4 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address for more than 2 months. Then complete the rest of the form.**

FORM ACS-1(2017)  
09-14-2016

OMB No. 0607-0810  
OMB No. 0607-0936


ACS-1(2017), Page 1, Base (Black)



### Revised Questionnaire

13028014

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



## The American Community Survey

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**Start Here**

We wrote to you earlier with a request to respond online. We are sending this paper questionnaire to all households that have not yet responded because we realize not everyone can or wants to respond over the internet.

**You have two ways to respond:**

Respond online today at:  
<https://respond.census.gov/acs>

OR

Complete this form and mail it back as soon as possible.

**➔ Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form.** We will only contact you if needed for official Census Bureau business.

Last Name

First Name  MI

Area Code + Number  -

**➔ How many people are living or staying at this address?**

- **INCLUDE** everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months.
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- **DO NOT INCLUDE** anyone who is living somewhere else for more than 2 months, such as a college student living away or someone in the Armed Forces on deployment.

Number of people

**➔ Fill out pages 2, 3, and 4 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address for more than 2 months. Then complete the rest of the form.**

**If you need help or have questions about completing this survey,** please call toll-free 1-800-354-7271.

**Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD):**  
Call toll-free 1-800-582-8330.

**¿Necesita ayuda?** Llame sin cargo alguno al 1-877-833-5623. For more information about the American Community Survey, visit our web site at: <http://www.census.gov/acs>

FORM ACS-1(0)MMT  
09-14-2016

OMB No. 0607-0810  
OMB No. 0607-0936

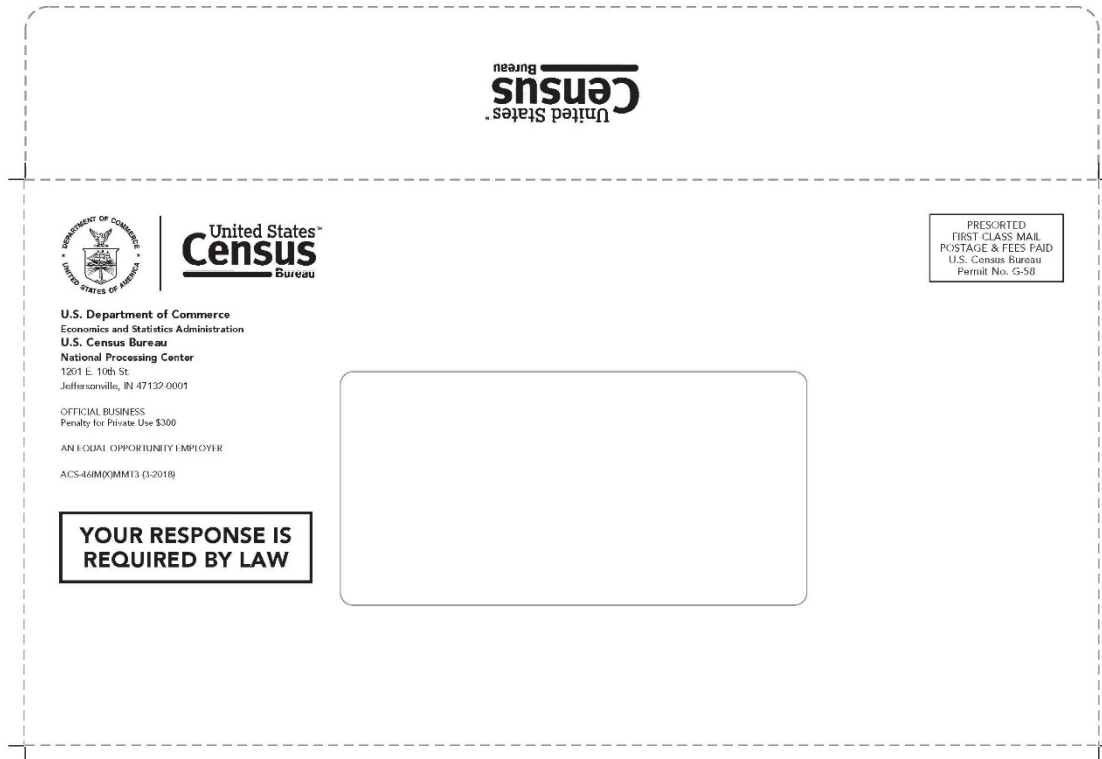
ACS-1(2017), Page 1, Green Pantone 354 (18, 100%)



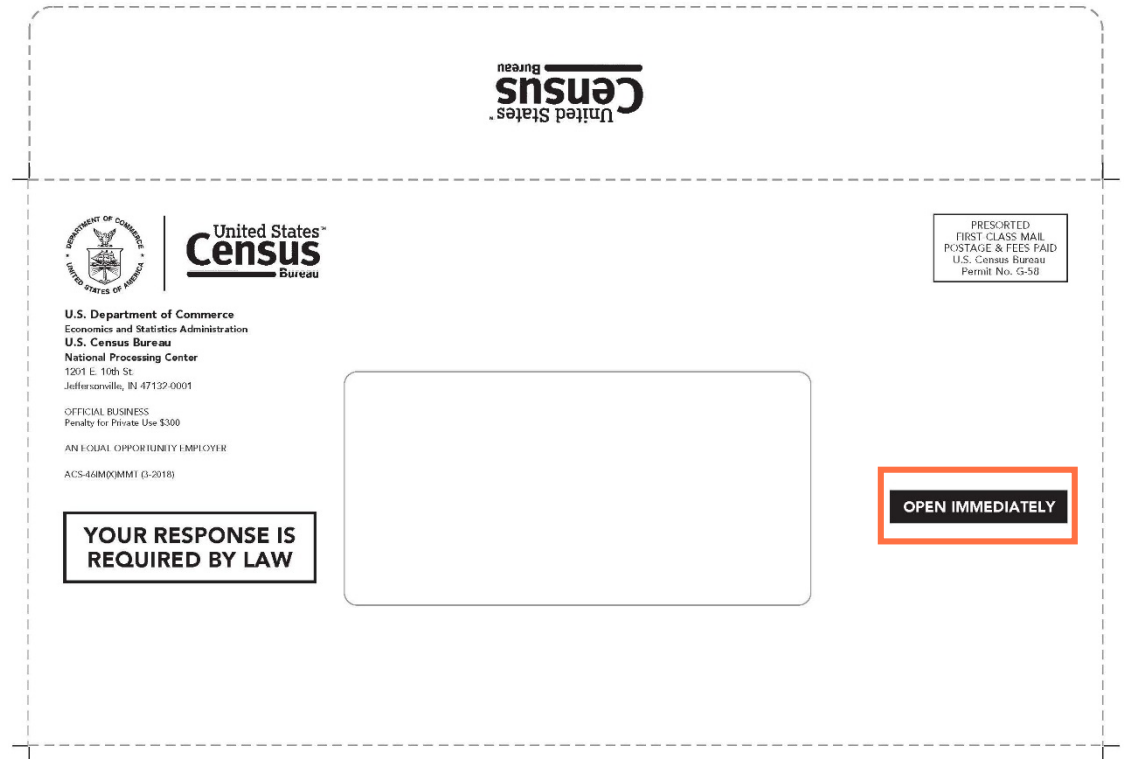
# 2018 Mail Materials Test

*Including the Text “Open Immediately” on the Envelope*

## Production Envelope



## Test Envelope



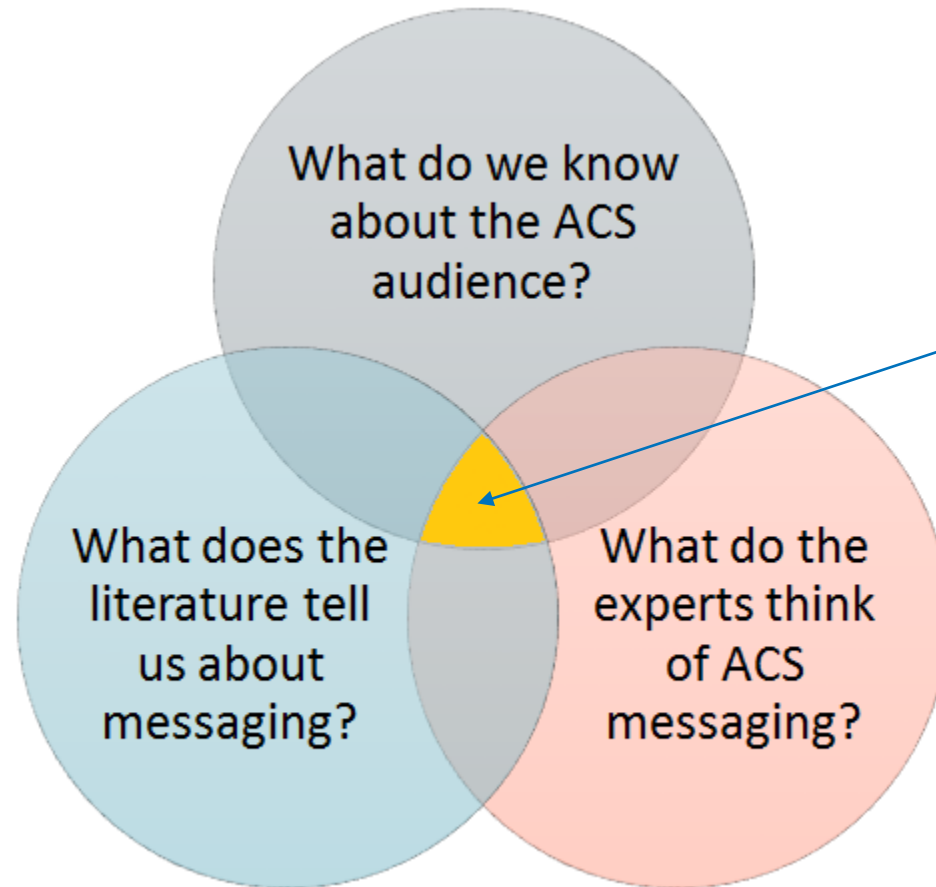
# 2018 Mail Materials Test: Findings

Research Objective	Finding
Observe impact on self-response of <b>removing materials</b> from some of the mailings	Removing materials from some mailings <b>does not appear to impact self-response</b> , but reduces the costs of the mailings.
Observe impact on self-response of <b>redesigning the questionnaire cover</b>	Modifying wording on the questionnaire cover <b>increased total self-response return rates</b> before the fifth mailing and before the start of CAPI.
Observe impact on self-response of <b>modifying the wording and design of the mail materials</b> , including adding "Open Immediately" on the outside of the Initial Mailing Envelope	The emphasizing mandatory messaging significantly <b>increased self-response</b> before CAPI. Including "Open Immediately" had a significant <b>increase in self-response</b> before the questionnaire package was sent.

# Starting Over: Develop New Mail Materials

- Objective: Invest in a strategic framework for messaging in the ACS mailings to increase self-response.
  1. Develop a strategic framework for mail messaging
  2. Evaluate current materials
  3. Design new materials
  4. Test new materials

# Develop a Strategic Framework for Mail Messaging



**STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

# Evaluate Current Materials

## Lesson 1: Limit Volume of Messaging

### Mailing 1: 129 messages across 5 items

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU  
1201 East 10th Street  
Jeffersonville, IN 47132-0001  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
Penalty for Private Use \$300  
ACS-65M20121 (10-2012)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

POSTAGE  
FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
POSTAGE & FEE PAID  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Permit No. G-28

The American Community Survey

**YOUR RESPONSE IS  
REQUIRED BY LAW**

United States  
Census  
Bureau

United States  
Census  
Bureau

American Community Survey

U.S. Department of Commerce | Economics and Statistics Administration

Go to <https://respond.census.gov/acs> to complete the American Community Survey online.

ACS 999 901 193 02 111 1704 17 77777-44659 (Vea el otro lado para español.)

880-00967

TO THE RESIDENT OF:  
2382 GARFIELD ST  
ANYTOWN VA 55555-1234

**IMPORTANT:** You will need information from the address label on this card to log in. If you need help or have questions about the American Community Survey, call the toll-free number 1-800-354-7271.



U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU  
**census.gov**

ACS-1201X2017  
(6-2017)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20533-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

A message from the Director, U.S. Census Bureau ...

Your household has been randomly selected to complete a very important national survey, the American Community Survey. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts this survey to give our country an up-to-date picture of how we live—our education, employment, housing, and more. Using the enclosed instructions, please complete the survey online as soon as possible at:

<https://respond.census.gov/acs>

The Census Bureau is using the Internet to collect this information in an effort to conserve natural resources, save taxpayers' money, and process your data more efficiently. If you are unable to complete the survey online, there is no need to contact us. We will send you a paper questionnaire in a few weeks.

This survey collects critical information used to meet the needs of communities across the United States. For example, results from this survey are used to decide where new schools, hospitals, and fire stations are needed. This information also helps communities plan for the kinds of emergency situations that might affect you and your neighbors, such as floods and other natural disasters.

The Census Bureau chose your address, not you personally, as part of a randomly selected sample. You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey. The U.S. Census Bureau is required by law to keep your information confidential. The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data.

If you need help completing the survey, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you.

Enclosures

United States  
Census  
Bureau

census.gov

Frequently Asked Questions

American Community Survey

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau

**What is the American Community Survey?**

The American Community Survey collects information about population and housing characteristics for the nation, states, cities, counties, metropolitan areas, and communities on a continuous basis. Based on the American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau can provide up-to-date data about our rapidly changing country more often than once every 10 years when the census is conducted.

**How do I benefit by answering the American Community Survey?**

Communities need data about the well-being of children, families, and the older population to provide services to them. By responding to the American Community Survey questionnaire, you are helping your community to establish goals, identify problems and solutions, and measure the performance of programs.

The data also are used to decide where to locate new highways, schools, hospitals, and community centers; to show a large corporation that a town has the workforce the company needs; and in many other ways.

**Do I have to answer the questions on the American Community Survey?**

Yes. Your response to this survey is required by law (Title 13, U.S. Code, Sections 141, 193, and 221). Title 13, as changed by Title 18, imposes a penalty for not responding. We estimate this survey will take about 40 minutes to complete.

**How will the Census Bureau use the information that I provide?**

By law, the Census Bureau can only use your responses to produce statistics. Your information will be used in combination with information from other households to produce data for your community. Similar data will be produced for communities across Puerto Rico and the United States.

We may combine your answers with information that you give to other agencies to enhance the statistical uses of these data. This information will be given the same protections as your survey information. Based on the information that you provide, you may be asked to participate in other Census Bureau surveys that are voluntary.

**Will the Census Bureau keep my information confidential?**

Yes. The Census Bureau is required by law to protect your information. The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data.

**Where can I find more information about the American Community Survey or get assistance?**

You may visit our Web site at [census.gov/acs](https://census.gov/acs) or call 1-800-354-7271, if you need assistance or more information.

The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting the American Community Survey

In a few days you will receive an American Community Survey questionnaire in the mail. Because you are living in the United States, you are required by law to respond to this survey. If you have questions about the form, please call us toll-free at 1-800-354-7271.

**What is the American Community Survey?**

The American Community Survey is an important survey conducted by the Census Bureau. It is designed to give communities current information about its people and housing. In order to make well-informed decisions, a community needs accurate and reliable information. By responding to this survey, you are helping your community to get this kind of information.

**Will my answers to this survey be kept confidential?**

Yes. The U.S. Census Bureau is required by law to keep your information confidential. The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data.

La Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos está realizando la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense

En unos días, recibirá por correo un cuestionario de la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense. Como usted está viviendo en los Estados Unidos, la ley exige que usted responda a este cuestionario. Si tiene preguntas sobre el cuestionario, llámenos al 1-877-433-7625 para hablar con uno de nuestros empleados que habla español. La llamada es gratis. El empleado podrá contestar sus preguntas o usted podrá completar la encuesta por teléfono.

**¿Qué es la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense?**

La Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense es una encuesta importante realizada por la Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos. Está diseñada para brindar información actual a las comunidades sobre las personas y las viviendas. Para poder tomar buenas decisiones, una comunidad necesita información precisa y confiable. Al responder a esta encuesta, usted está ayudando a su comunidad a obtener este tipo de información.

**¿Serán confidenciales mis respuestas a esta encuesta?**

Si. La Oficina del Censo de los EE.UU. está obligada por ley a mantener confidencial su información. A la Oficina del Censo no se le permite divulgar sus respuestas de manera que sea posible su identificación. En conformidad con la Ley para el Fortalecimiento de la Seguridad Cibernética Federal del 2015, sus datos serán protegidos contra los riesgos de seguridad cibernética mediante los controles aplicados a los sistemas que transmiten su información.

Important Information From the U.S. Census Bureau

Información Importante de la Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos

美國人口普查查詢重要通知

Thống tin quan trọng từ Văn phòng Thống kê Dân số Hoa Kỳ

Важная информация от Бюро переписи населения США

미국 인구조사국에서 권하드리는 중요한 정보

United States  
Census  
Bureau

# Evaluate Current Materials

## *Lesson 2: Follow Plain Language Guidelines*

Mail Piece	FRE Score Interpretation	Grade Level
Mailing 1 Letter	“fairly difficult to read”	10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>
Multilingual Brochure	“difficult to read”	College
FAQ Brochure	“difficult to read”	College

### **Flesch Reading Ease Scores of ACS Mail Materials**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office

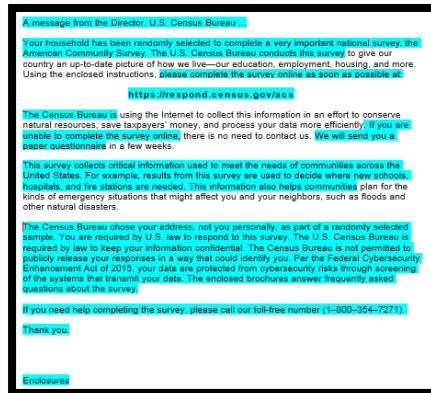
*Schreiner, Oliver & Poehler (forthcoming)*

# Evaluate Current Materials

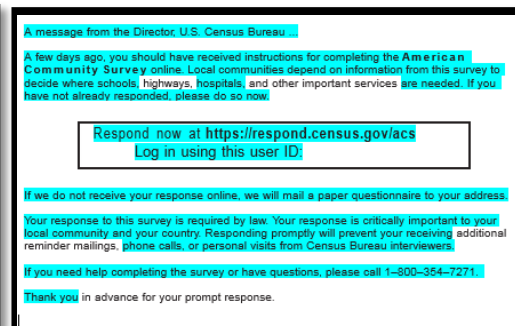
*Lesson 3: Each mailing should have a clear purpose and highlight different reasons to participate*

## Repetition across mail materials

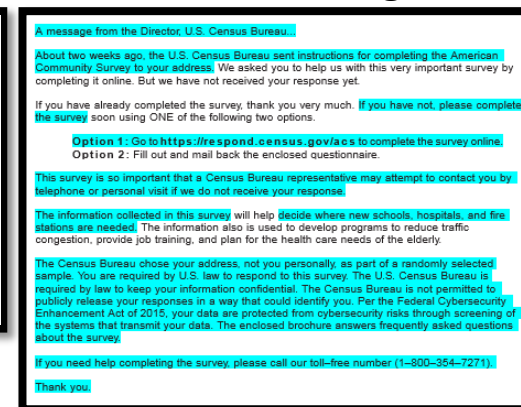
First Mailing



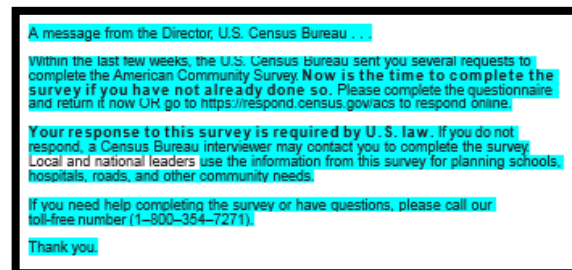
Second Mailing



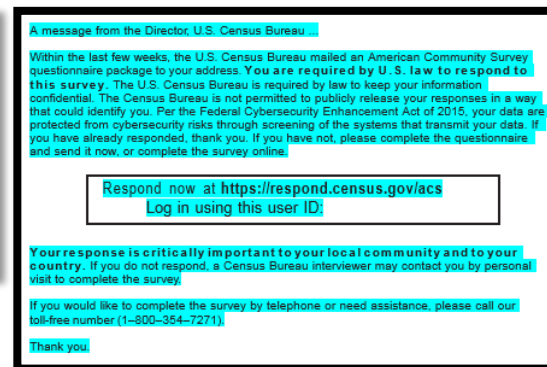
Third Mailing



Fourth Mailing





Fifth Mailing



# Evaluate Current Materials

## Lesson 4: Leverage the Census Bureau Brand

The image shows the top portion of a U.S. Census Bureau form titled "THE American Community Survey". It includes the U.S. Department of Commerce logo, the text "U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE Economic and Statistics Administration U.S. CENSUS BUREAU", and the survey title. Below the title, there is a "Start Here" section with instructions on how to respond online at <https://respond.census.gov/acs> or by mail. It also contains a "Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD)" section with contact information for Spanish speakers. The form includes fields for date, name, and address, and instructions on who to include in the count.

	Graphic Used	
		
Envelopes	X	
Instruction Cards	X	
FAQ Brochure	X	
Multilingual Brochure	X	
Letters	X	X
Survey Form		X
Post Card		X




# Design New Materials


- Improve branding
- Use color and icons to draw attention
- F-pattern headings to ease readability
- Reduce amount of text (increase white space)
- Use plain language
- Focus messaging:
  - Mailing 1 = Communicate trust and legitimacy of survey
  - Mailing 2 = Communicate benefits of participation
  - Mailing 3 = Communicate options to respond online or by paper form

# New ACS Materials for Testing: Mailing 1

## Letter 1

 United States<sup>®</sup>  
**Census**  
Bureau

U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
Office of the Director

  
**THE AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY  
SURVEY**

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the premier source for detailed population and housing information about our nation.

The ACS helps local officials, community leaders, and businesses understand the changes taking place in their communities.

A message from the Director of the Census Bureau:

Your household has been selected to participate in the **American Community Survey**. The Census Bureau has conducted this survey since 2005. This survey provides an up-to-date picture of how we live – including topics such as education, employment, and housing – to help local leaders determine the needs of your community.

Please use the enclosed instruction card to **respond now at:**

**<https://respond.census.gov/acs>**

When you respond to this survey, you are doing your part to ensure that decisions about your community can be made using the best data available. The information that you provide is so important that **your response is required by law** (Title 13, U.S. Code, Sections 141, 193, and 221).


If you are unable to complete the survey online, there is no need to contact us. We will send you a paper questionnaire in a few weeks. If you need help or have questions, please call us at 1-800-354-7271.

Thank you,


Steven D. Dillingham

census.gov

## Letter 2

 United States<sup>®</sup>  
**Census**  
Bureau

U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
Office of the Director

  
**THE AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY  
SURVEY**

**Did you know?**

Non-profit groups use the American Community Survey to plan and build parks and playgrounds in communities across the country.

The American Community Survey helps direct more than \$675 billion in federal funding every year to communities nationwide.

You can help your community by responding today!

Dear Resident:

A few days ago, you should have received a notice to complete the American Community Survey online. **If you have already responded, thank you. If not, please do so now.**

Respond now at **<https://respond.census.gov/acs>**  
Log in with this User ID:

Your answers help identify local needs such as job training, highway construction, and health care services.

Your response is so important that it is **required by law**.

If you are unable to answer online, you will receive a paper questionnaire in about two weeks. If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call 1-800-354-7271.


Thank you for helping your community.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Dillingham  
Director

census.gov

## Letter 3


 United States<sup>®</sup>  
**Census**  
Bureau

U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
Office of the Director


**American Community Survey Form Enclosed**

About two weeks ago, you should have received a letter asking you to respond to the American Community Survey. As promised, we are sending you a survey form.

If you have already responded, thank you. If not, you now have two ways to respond – please choose the one that works best for you:

 Respond today at **<https://respond.census.gov/acs>** on your computer or smartphone.

OR

 Fill out the survey form and mail it back in the postage-paid envelope.

**Your response to the American Community Survey is required by law.** Just as the law requires us to report for jury duty, pay taxes, and earn a license to drive, it also requires us to respond to this survey.

If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call 1-800-354-7271.

We look forward to receiving your response.


Sincerely,

Steven D. Dillingham  
Director

*Nota: Vea al otro lado para responder en español.*

ACS 14020P (M.F.) 03/11/2010

census.gov

  
**Did you know?**

Millions of households participate in the American Community Survey every year.

When you respond to this survey, you are helping your community make decisions using the best data available.

Thank you for being the voice of your community.

# Next Steps

- Implement emphasized mail materials from 2018 testing in ACS production (January 2020)
- Due Dates Test (October 2019)
  - Include due date and messaging about benefit/consequences to 5<sup>th</sup> mailing
- Strategic Framework Materials
  - Cognitive Testing (Fall 2019)
  - Field Testing (Fall 2020)

# Thank you!

## ACS Research and Evaluation Reports:

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/library/publications-and-working-papers/research-and-evaluation.html>

[Victoria.A.Velkoff@census.gov](mailto:Victoria.A.Velkoff@census.gov)

[Jennifer.M.Ortman@census.gov](mailto:Jennifer.M.Ortman@census.gov)

# Appendix Slides

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Experimental Treatments*

### Modified Control (MC)

- Removes FAQ brochure from 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> mailing
- Removes instruction card from 3<sup>rd</sup> mailing

### Emphasized Mandatory with Revised Questionnaire (ER)

- Stronger mandatory on envelopes
- Stronger mandatory in letters
- Updated design of letters and questionnaire

### De-emphasized Mandatory with Revised Questionnaire (DR)

- Stronger mandatory on envelopes
- Softens mandatory in letters
- Uses updated design of letters and questionnaire

### De-emphasized Mandatory with Current Questionnaire (DP)

- Same as *DR* except *questionnaire*

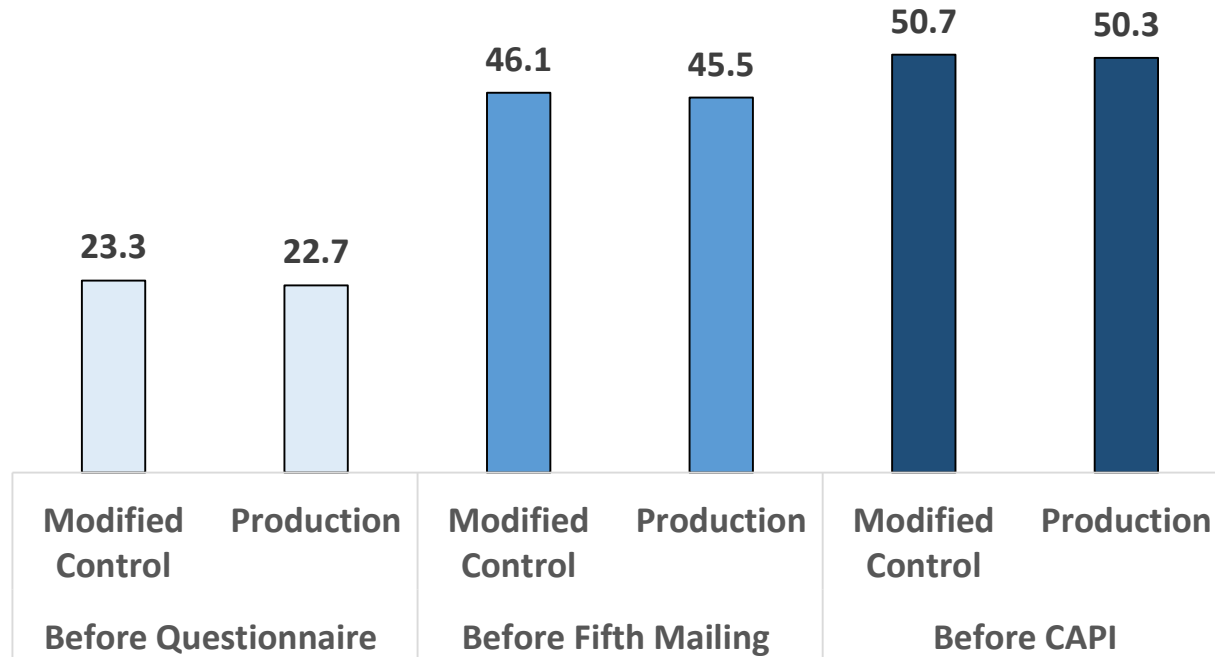
### Softer/Eliminated Mandatory (SR)

- Softens mandatory in letters
- Removes mandatory from some mailings
- Uses updated design of letters and questionnaire

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Removal of Materials*

Total Self-Response Return Rates



Removing materials from some mailings does not appear to impact self-response, but reduces the costs of the mailings.

<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

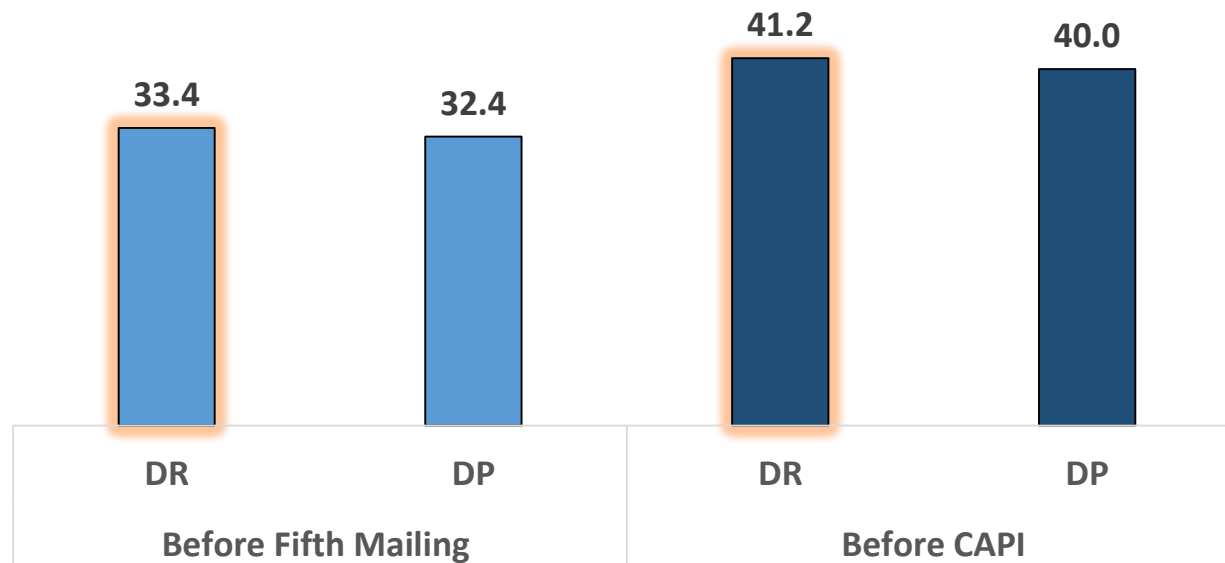
Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Redesigned Questionnaire Cover*

### Total Self-Response Return Rates

Universe = Only addresses sent the paper questionnaire (mailing 3).



The redesigned questionnaire cover (DR) increased total self-response return rates before the fifth mailing and before the start of CAPI.

<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

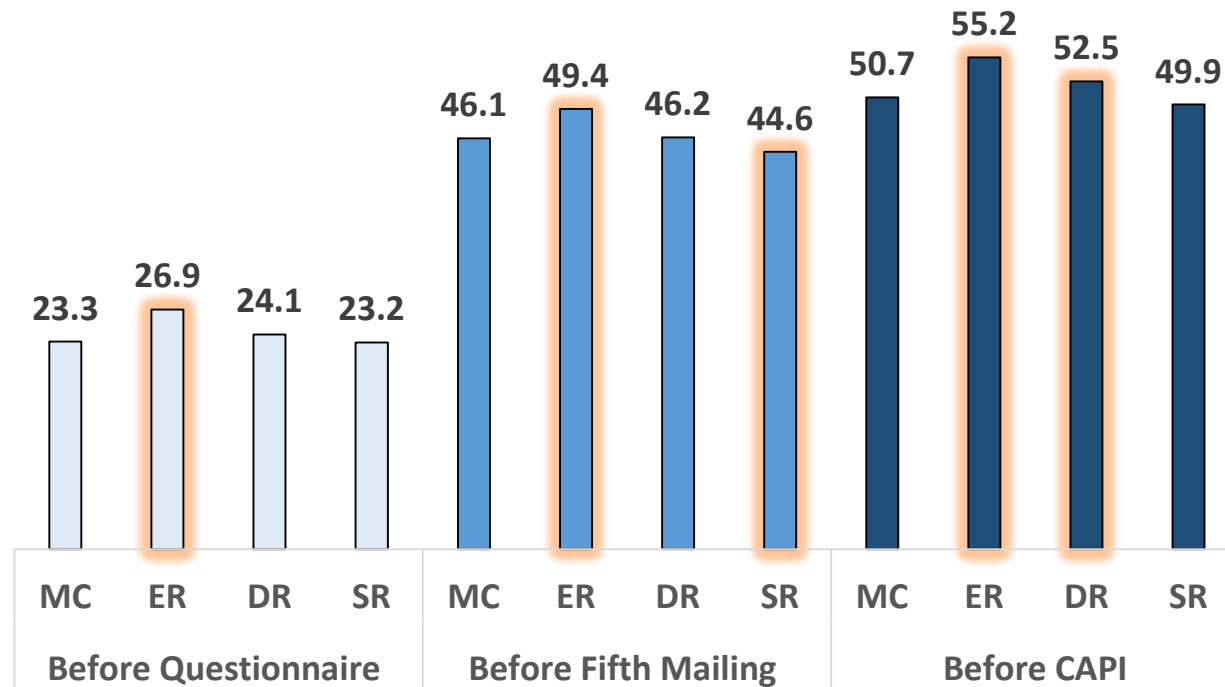
Difference significant at 90% confidence level.



# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Modifying the Design and Wording*

Total Self-Response Return Rates



The emphasized mandatory treatment had higher total self-response return rates at all three time points. The de-emphasized mandatory with revised questionnaire treatment had higher total self-response return rates before the start of CAPI.

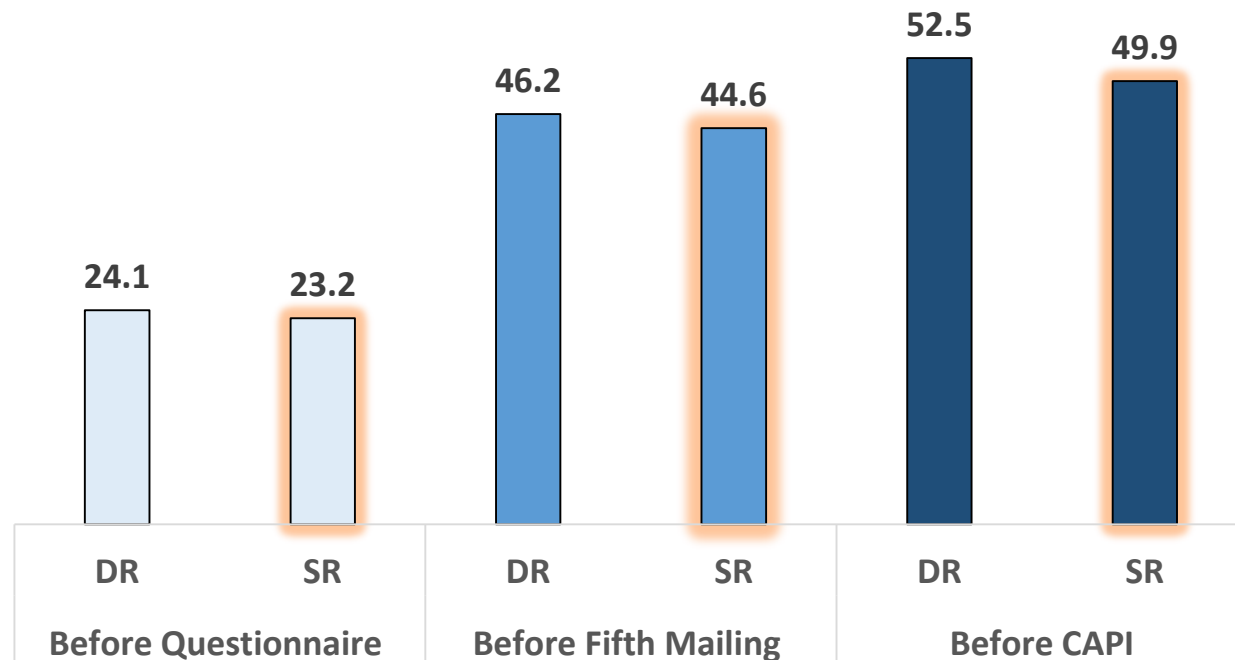
<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Effect of Softening/Eliminating Mandatory Language*

Total Self-Response Return Rates



Softening/eliminating the mandatory language resulted in lower total self-response return rates at all three time points.

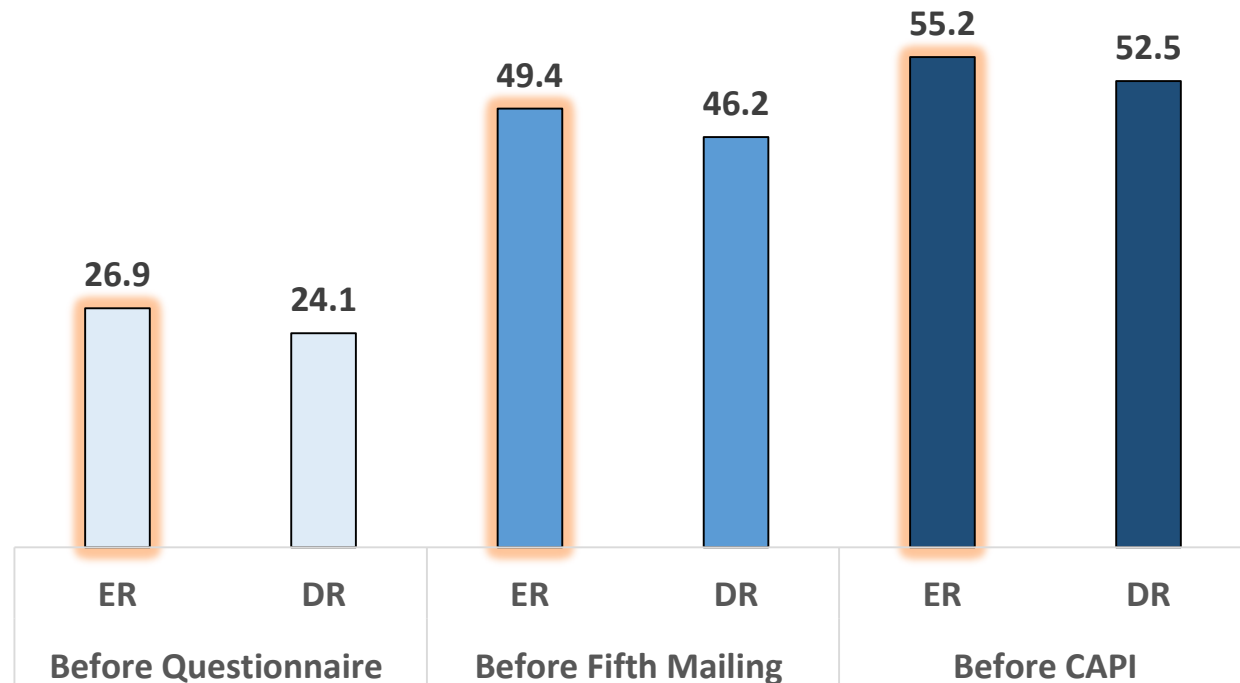
<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Effect of Strengthening or Emphasizing Mandatory Language*

Total Self-Response Return Rates



Emphasizing the mandatory language resulted in higher total self-response return rates at all three time points.

<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

Difference significant at 90% confidence level.

# 2018 Mail Materials Test

## *Results: Impact of Not Including the Phrase “Open Immediately”*

Total Self-Response Return Rates



Including the phrase “open immediately” significantly increased self-response return rates before the questionnaire package was sent.

<sup>1</sup>The **self-response return rate** is the number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses that either provided a non-blank return by mail or TQA, or a complete or sufficient partial response by internet *divided* by the total number of mailable and deliverable sample addresses *multiplied* by 100.

Difference significant at 90% confidence level.