RESPONSE RATE SUMMIT
National Health Interview &
Consumer Expenditure Quarterly Surveys

U.S. Census Bureau and the
Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group

February 21 & 22, 2002
Crystal City Marriott, Arlington, VA

SUMMARY REPORT

Developed by:

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[1] This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Census Bureau staff. It has undergone a Census Bureau review more limited in scope than that of official Census Bureau publications. This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The report was derived from summary materials prepared by Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc.

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Executive Summary

The Response Rate Summit convened on February 21st and 22nd, 2002, at the Crystal City Marriott in Arlington, Virginia. The U.S. Census Bureau and the Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group (IHSNG) sponsored the summit. The IHSNG is a subcommittee of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM). The purpose of the summit was to provide a forum for discussion among experts in the field about how to address concerns related to the decreasing response rate trend in household surveys. The subcommittee chose two national surveys, the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and the Consumer Expenditure Quarterly (CEQ) survey, as the basis for discussion during the summit because they represent a cross-sectional and a longitudinal household survey, respectively.

Nancy Bates was the chief organizer and the expert panel members were as follows:

Roger Tourangeau (facilitator), Joint Program in Survey Methodology
Paul Biemer, Research Triangle Institute
David Cantor, Westat
Ed Cohen, Arbitron Inc.
Bob Groves, University of Michigan
Graham Kalton, Westat
Dan Kasprzyk, Mathematica Policy Research
Paul Lavrakas, Nielsen Media Research
Stanley Presser, University of Maryland
Eleanor Singer, University of Michigan
Brian Williams, Statistics Canada

The summit lasted two days. On the first day, panel members listened to a series of presentations that provided background information about the two surveys. On the second day, the panel members engaged in open discussion to brainstorm ways to increase the surveys' response rates. At the end of the second day, panel members voted for what they thought were the top three recommendations. The top five recommendations in order of importance are as follows:

1. **Collect and analyze detailed contact/call record data.** Use these data in a twofold manner: (1) for analytic purposes, and (2) as a feedback mechanism for ROs and FRs. Devise an automated system to capture case histories—including number of contacts, interim outcomes (outcome of each contact/attempt), reasons for refusals, day of week and time of contact/attempt, and demographics of refusal/noncontact households. Use this information to better discern between refusals and noncontact, develop an interview history of tracts, design targeted materials, and understand motivations for noncooperation. Use call record data to identify and aid FRs having problems. Look at reasons for refusal by demographics (e.g., age, sex). Determine optimal callback patterns.

2. **Refusal aversion training.** This training promotes a transfer of the skills used by the very best interviewers. It gives FRs a strong knowledge of the survey and explains specific concerns that reluctant respondents have. It teaches FRs how to listen for these concerns and immediately counter them. The panel recommended expanding the use of this training method beyond the experiment conducted in the NHIS. We should use the model that allows SFRs in the regions to administer the training. We should continue to track interview-level response rates to further refine the training and test whether the training has a diminishing effect over time.

3. **Incentives.** Conduct experiments with the CEQ and the NHIS to explore unconditional incentives for respondents. The incentives do not necessarily have to be monetary but should be survey-specific. Develop an incentive program to also motivate interviewers.

4. **Change in sample design/caseload.** The NHIS should experiment with a monthly or biweekly sample design. It could also expand the interview period to include a third weekend and/or spread out the caseload. For the CEQ, consider using a clustered sample design, then estimate impact of clustering on response rates. Redesign coordination of sampling and workload.

5. **Redesign the advance contacts.**

   - Tailor advance contact to dispel objections
   - Call respondents prior to the visit
   - Create a 1-800 survey information number
   - Create survey information websites
   - Send Thank you notes

   Letters/Brochures:
   - Use more jazzy graphics
   - Use less bureaucratic language
   - Change the font
   - Add more personalization (business cards, name of interviewer, etc.)
   - Conduct experiments on effectiveness of redesign

Other recommendations included the following:

Survey Design

- Sample monthly or biweekly instead of weekly (*NHIS specific*)
- Add an extra weekend to the field period (*NHIS specific*)
- Make the surveys shorter and less complex (use matrixes)

Field Representative Responsibility

- Set weekly contact goals
- Front load cases
- Give interviewers more feedback
- Have a response rate summit with field representatives

Other Suggestions

- Research social norms people have for dealing with door-to-door interviews
- Use technology to survey’s advantage

Organizer

Nancy Bates, U.S. Bureau of the Census, and Co-chair, the Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group (IHSNG)

Expert Panel Participants

Roger Tourangeau (facilitator), Joint Program in Survey Methodology, University of Maryland
Paul Biemer, Research Triangle Institute
David Cantor, Westat
Ed Cohen, Arbitron Inc.
Bob Groves, University of Michigan
Graham Kalton, Westat
Dan Kasprzyk, Mathematica Policy Research
Paul Lavrakas, Nielsen Media Research
Stanley Presser, University of Maryland
Eleanor Singer, University of Michigan
Brian Williams, Statistics Canada

Day I Presenters

National Center for Health Statistics, NHIS:

Trena M. Ezzati-Rice
Howard Riddick
Adrienne Oneto (U.S. Census Bureau)

Bureau of Labor Statistics, CEQ:

Sioux Groves
Dave Swanson
Sylvia Johnson-Herring
Kim Frahn (U.S. Census Bureau)
Ronni Watkins (U.S. Census Bureau)

SUMMARY OF DAY 1 PRESENTATIONS

Clyde Tucker introduced the summit as a meeting sponsored by the Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group (IHSNG), a subcommittee of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM). He explained that the purpose of the summit was to provide a forum for discussion among experts in the field about how to address the concerns related to the decreasing response rate trend in household surveys. The subcommittee chose two national surveys, the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and the Consumer Expenditure Quarterly (CEQ) survey, as the basis for discussion during the summit because they represent a cross-sectional and a longitudinal household survey, respectively.

Day One of the Summit was spent familiarizing panel members with the NHIS and the CEQ. Representatives from the Bureau of the Census, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics made a series of presentations on each survey. At the end of the day, two Field Staff representatives made presentations to describe to the panel members what it was like being in the field. For a list of presenters, please see the Agenda provided as an attachment to this report.

There were three presentations for each survey. The first three presentations were about the NHIS. Trena Ezzati-Rice began with a presentation titled, "Overview of the Current NHIS Sample Design and Plans for the 2005 Redesign." She introduced the panel to the NHIS by describing its key features, current sample design, and the challenges for achieving a high response rate. She also explained the need for a redesign and the objectives for the 2005 redesign. For more details, see attachment 2.

The second two presentations about NHIS went into more specific details concerning response rates. Howard Riddick presented an overview of response rates and reasons for nonresponse in the NHIS. There was some discussion about the within-data collection year decline of response rates across quarters. No one offered an immediate explanation for the trend, but all agreed it warrants further study. See attachment 3 for presentation slides.

Adrienne Oneto followed with a presentation on what influences NHIS response rates. Some of this past year's influences and interventions included September 11th, a refusal avoidance half-day workshop, and experimentation with an extra weekend added to the field period. She also listed nonresponse remedies suggested by the regional offices. These included things like respondent incentives, revising the screening metrics, moving sensitive questions to the end of the interview, and revising the informed consent materials. Further details of the presentation are found in attachment 3.

After a break for lunch, the presentations continued starting with an "Overview of the CEQ" by Sioux Groves. Topics covered included a description of the CE Diary and CEQ interview content and format, the domain of the CE interview, average interview time, and the percent of eligible units. She also discussed the CE population, definition of a responding unit, and replacement interviews.

Dave Swanson made the next presentation entitled "Characteristics of the CEQ's Nonresponders: Who are They?" He explained to the panel what the characteristics of responders and nonresponders look like. He also described how respondents can drop in or out of the CE across panels and the different rates for these patterns. He also went over the types of nonresponse and the items on the CEQ that are underreported. See attachment 5 for a copy of the presentation handouts.

Sylvia Johnson-Herring concluded the series of lectures about the CEQ with a presentation on sample design. She explained the sampling frame and sample selection. She also discussed the different sampling segments including unit, special place, area, and permit segments. She concluded with an explanation of CE weighting and the integration of data from the diary and interview components. A copy of her handouts are found in attachment 6.

Field Staff representatives Kim Frahn, and Ronni Watkins gave the last two presentations for the day. They both explained the responsibilities of field representatives and described what a typical day was like for an interviewer. Both Kim and Ronni talked about methods they use to get higher response rates, including internal goals and persistent monitoring. Kim covered interviewer training while Ronni listed advice that she gave her team of interviewers. Kim indicated the attrition rate of FRs is about 20 percent in his region and that 25 new interviewers must be trained per year. He estimated that about 30 percent of his time is spent handling refusals. He also indicated that 'no one home' is not an acceptable final outcome assuming proper procedures have been followed. He then described the methodology used to deliver follow-up materials for reluctant respondents. In his region, the refusal conversion rate is about 50 percent.

One panel member asked Kim what he considered to be the number one skill or tool to help interviewers get good response rates. Both Kim and Ronni agreed that it was knowledge of the survey. Interviewers that have a solid understanding of the survey's purpose are more adept at gaining respondent cooperation. They both agreed that this knowledge gives interviewers the ability to "think on their feet" and quickly respond to respondents' concerns.

Ronni outlined her methods to motivate her team of FRs. These include a having a business-like manner, being persistent versus pushy, letting angry respondents vent, memorizing the 'whos' and 'what fors' of CE, and using a good 'opening line' at the door. She discussed her follow-up methods for reluctant respondents which include sending a thank you letter. She suggested holding small-scale workshops for FRs so they get feedback and do not feel so isolated.

SUMMARY OF DAY 2 DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The panel attacked the response rate problems from all fronts. They looked at the system used to administer the survey, the organization of the survey itself, and the workload of the field representatives. Using open discussion, reviews of current literature, and field experience, the group thought of a variety of different ways in which response rates can be increased for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and the Consumer Expenditure Quarterly (CEQ).

The discussions revolved around two main questions: How can we get a higher response rate, and how can we get a lower noncontact rate? Each issue addressed by the group and each suggestion made was aimed at either decreasing the noncontact rate in the hope that an increase in the response rate would follow, or just plain increasing the overall response rate.

Specific Survey Suggestions

Discussion began with an analysis of the life cycle of NHIS. There were two general groups: those who thought that NHIS should maintain its weekly sampling procedures for comparability and those who thought that it would decrease burden to do a monthly or biweekly sample. Some NCHS staff argued the sampling process should remain as it is for comparability across years.

The next major life cycle discussion was about the length of the field period and its impact on response rates and noncontact rates for NHIS. Everyone agreed that the field period was short, which led to decreased response rates and increased noncontact rates. To lengthen the field period, a suggestion to add an extra weekend to the field period was made.

Someone suggested that both the CEQ and NHIS should reduce the complexity and length of their questionnaires. A panel member remarked that it had been his experience that too many surveys were designed without taking into account the concerns of the survey takers. Introducing matrix sampling was one idea mentioned to decrease the length and complexity of the surveys. Evaluating the usefulness of each question was another suggestion to reach the same goals.

The Role of Field Representatives

In order to handle the demands of such a short field period, interviewers need to be efficient. For that reason, how interviewers handle their workloads and monthly assignments was an important topic. Someone made the observation that the interviewers were completing most of their interviews closer to the end of the month. These observations concerned panel members who were worried that the interviewers might be putting off making contacts and therefore not leaving enough time at the end of the month to finish making all contacts. Panel members agreed to the suggestion to set weekly contact goals. Panel members also agreed that an emphasis needed to be placed on not saving problem cases for the end of the field period.

In a discussion concerning interviewer efficiency, most people agreed that it was not necessarily the length of the field period, but how interviewers used their time that was the issue.

Suggestions as to how this need for interviewer efficiency could be met ranged from recommending that interviewer notes be taken to identify certain positives and negatives for each interviewer in order to tailor their segments to their attributes. At least one panel member remarked that interviewers might be assigned too many cases. If there were more interviewers, there would be smaller workloads.

Another acknowledged recommendation was to front load cases. Gathering information about the physical characteristics of cases during the listing or immediately after the sample is drawn allows interviewers to familiarize themselves with their assignments prior to the field period. This information can be used to assign cases (e.g., contact cases in urban areas, high-rises, gated communities) early in the field period. Early detection of possible problem areas is another possible use of this information.

Lastly, giving the interviewers more performance feedback was suggested as a motivator. One panel member remarked, "You would be surprised to know how much interviewers would like feedback." A response rate summit similar to this one but for field representatives was also encouraged.

Call Records

In the context of the panel conversations, the term "call records" was used loosely to refer to any means of gathering histories on contact and contact attempts. There was unanimous agreement that the collection of call record information would benefit interviewers, regional offices, and headquarters. Everyone concurred that call record data had very useful information for each party; however, there were additional costs to analyze and deliver the data to the interviewers once it was collected. Automated versus manual data collection was discussed, and it was established that automated data was more useful yet more costly. Some panel members were concerned about when interviewers should open their laptops and if they would bother to open them if the respondent was not at home. It was concluded that keying in data written on paper was much more time consuming than laptops and laptop data collection would provide quicker turn-around.

The issue of outcome codes when making a call record was discussed. There was controversy among the group as to how one should classify "Type A" results, or noninterviews, particularly when comparing refusals with "not-at-homes." Every member of the panel seemed to agree that more specific outcome codes for noninterviews needed to be developed. For example, was initial contact never made or was there initial contact but no follow-up? Would you call a follow-up contact that was never reached a "not-at-home," a "broken appointment," or a "temporarily unavailable"?

A member of the IHSNG noted that the group prioritized the topic of call records in 2000 and a subgroup was formed to study it. The result was a valuable report containing recommendations for capturing interim outcome codes, reasons for refusals, and ancillary demographic and behavioral data on noncooperative households. The IHSNG has been waiting for a sponsor agency to take an interest in these recommendations and NHIS is now ready to implement them as one feature of the Blaise reengineering.

Data collection on refusals was another recommendation. Classifying refusals by demographic and attitudinal variables of those who refused and by physical and social environment variables about the living unit and the neighborhood could provide valuable information for reducing refusals.

By and large, the group found call records to be very valuable tools to better discern refusals and noncontact, develop an interview history of contacts, design targeted materials, and understand motivations for noncooperation. In addition, the feedback helps to motivate interviewers.

Advance Contacts

The next discussion began with a thorough examination of the current methods used for advanced contacts. Most of the group agreed that an advance letter was helpful. The panel strongly recommended that instead of a "face lift," we revolutionize the advance contact protocol.

Citing low readership of advance letters, most agreed that if there are required statements, they should be voiced in the letter; however, increasing the readership was still a priority. Cosmetic changes suggested to increase readership included adding jazzy graphics and changing the font. It was agreed that the more detailed information should be displayed in a brochure of some type rather than the letter.

Content changes suggested including more personalization—such as the business card of the field representative, making the language of the letter less bureaucratic, and tailoring the letter to dispel possible objections. Other issues about advance letters that were raised included who should sign the letter, the sponsor or the Census? Should multiple advance letters be sent? Should letters be customized for each region? Should we use FedEx to deliver advance letters? No decisive consensus was reached on the aforementioned questions. Everyone agreed that experiments should be conducted before reaching a conclusion.

The importance of the advance letter to the response rate and the field representatives' comfort level was discussed as well. One person suggested revamping the advance letter every so often to boost the morale of the field representatives. It was unanimous that too much change was a bad thing; however, everyone agreed that an advance letter was important for interviewer comfort because it makes the house calls seem less like "cold calls." In the words of one field rep, "It gives us a reason to be there."

Additionally, panel members deliberated over whether having phone numbers of respondents would help get a leg up on advance contacts. Those against advance contacts argued that the advance phone call or letter could give the respondent more time to think of reasons not to participate. Most agreed that if someone was going to refuse, they would do so regardless of the advance contact. The panel suggested conducting a controlled experiment to best understand the impact that advance phone calls might have on unit nonresponse.

Panel members concluded that the low-cost suggested changes such as sending thank-you notes to each respondent may be worth implementing immediately; however, the high-cost suggestions would require more thought and experimentation. It was also suggested that interviewers keep a record of how many people received or were aware of the advance contact as a measure of effectiveness.

Refusal Aversion Training (RAT)

One popular idea resulting from the summit discussions was that of refusal aversion training (RAT). There was a consensus reached that interviewers would be better off and more prepared if they were trained in how to respond effectively to refusals from respondents in an effort to persuade them to participate. Panel members agreed that insuring interviewers had a strong knowledge of the survey and an awareness of the specific concerns that reluctant respondents have would teach them how to identify these concerns and immediately counter them with their own responses to objections. They agreed that training interviewers how to react was better than sending them into a field with a pre-scripted list of responses to possible refusals. Most of the group liked this idea; however, some speculated that it would only help the lower-tier interviewers and waste the time of the more experienced interviewers.

In the end, it was decided that the purpose of RAT was to promote the transfer of knowledge from the more experienced interviewers to the less experienced interviewers. It was also noted that training encourages motivation among interviewers.

Incentives and Motivators

Many panel members were of the mind that incentives would generate increased response rates. There was a lot of debate as to how incentives should be used. Another general observation made was the most motivated interviewers also had a propensity to be the best interviewers. Thus incentives and motivators must work in the direction of both the respondent and the interviewer.

The discussion began with the suggestion that too much time was being spent on advance contact, which would only get the response rate up a couple of percentage points relative to the potential increase for incentives. A panel member recommended discussing something that would really help the response rate shoot up. Despite intense conversations and healthy deliberations by almost all members of the panel, no universal conclusion was reached as to how incentives could be most effectively used in either survey.

The panel agreed that it was more complicated to give incentives on government surveys because the Office of Management and Budget must approve them for each individual survey. The panel agreed that the best way to get an incentive approved was to justify it, and that experimentation was the best form of justification. Consequently, a lot of experimentation with the use of incentives on the NHIS and CEQ was encouraged.

While thinking about incentives and motivators, members of the group put themselves in the shoes of the respondent. In doing so, the group members were able to narrow their focus and from the perspective of the respondent ask, “What’s in it for me?”

A general outline of the dialogue follows.

Here is what we know about incentives:

- There are two types: conditional and unconditional.
- There are two subtypes: monetary and nonmonetary.
- Incentives are more complicated to give for government surveys.
- Incentives are applicable for both respondents and FRs.
- Political conditions make a difference as to what kind of incentives to offer.

Suggestions as to what conditional and unconditional incentives should be used for respondents included:

- Give a little up front, the rest upon completion (e.g., split incentives).
- Only give incentives to refusals to get them to convert.
- Give everyone an incentive in the advance letter.
- Only give to those who complete the survey.

Suggestions as to what incentives/motivators could be used for interviewers:

- Goal sharing
- Performance statistics based on response rates, consent rates, refusals, etc.
- Exponential bonuses (especially for refusal conversions)
- Training

Suggestions made as to what the monetary and nonmonetary incentives could be included:

- Social and personal benefits
- Civic duty
- Material goods such as patriotic paraphernalia
- Fixed dollar amounts
- Variable compensation schemes
- Debit card in the advance letter and the four-digit code at completion

To promote these nonmonetary incentives more effectively, multiple panel members suggested developing a public service advertising (PSA) campaign similar to the "McGruff the Crime Dog" anti-crime campaign, sponsored by the Department of Justice. The suggestion was to have a legitimate national message informing the public of their civic responsibility or patriotic duty to participate in government data collection by taking part in surveys. If successful, the program would help to provide a larger context within which an interviewer working on a Federal survey could make reference in order to persuade a respondent to cooperate.

One panel member hypothesized a link between motivation and interviewer skills and said, "The interviewers that have all of the [effective interviewer] tools develop them because they are motivated and the people that don't have these tools aren't motivated." This theory raises the issue of training as a motivator. It was acknowledged that there is not a lot of evidence to support this link.

One argument raised against refusal conversion incentives was the frustration it causes field representatives. They consider it paradoxical to reward someone for being a problem case, thus lowering morale.

One major incentive scheme for interviewers that was discussed was goal sharing. Some panel members did not like the idea because it could lead to a free-rider problem. One panel member said that their highest response rates were achieved using goal sharing.

Overall the panel seemed to agree that incentives for interviewers were useful and created a more positive relationship between the interviewers and their supervisors. Instead of saying, "If you don't get an *x*% response rate, then you're fired," the supervisors can say, "If you get an *x*% response rate, then you get $*x*."

Response Bias

On the topic of response bias, one panel member was involved with a paper that looked at response bias as a function of the response rate. It was agreed that more research on the impact of nonresponse on the estimates needed to be conducted.

Other Suggestions

As the day was winding down, new suggestions were still being proposed. If time had permitted, additional discussion likely would have followed and perhaps these ideas would have developed further.

The first eleventh-hour idea was that perhaps the norms that people have for dealing with door-to-door interviewers have eroded over the years and changed since most contact is now by phone or computer. It therefore may be necessary to rethink and revolutionize the way in which the interviewer approaches the household.

A second idea was to decrease nonresponse rates by offering an abbreviated version of the survey to those who have refused to participate in the survey in its entirety.

Educating interviewers about general anti-survey predispositions was suggested as an additional method to further lower refusals. Exploring patterns among different ages and genders and educating interviewers on these trends was also suggested.

The subject of using technology to the survey's advantage was raised. A 1-800 number either for general survey inquiries or for specific interviewers as well as a web address included in the advance contact was suggested. Perhaps emailing respondents is a contact medium that can soon be incorporated. Sending videos through the mail as an advance contact method was another idea embracing technology.

It was noted that placing too much emphasis on the confidentiality of responses either by the interviewer or in the advance letter could lead respondents to be more concerned with issues of confidentiality than they would have been otherwise. Therefore, it was recommended to approach acknowledging confidentiality with care.

Summit Summary

At the end of the day, the facilitator presented a list of recommendations and suggestions. Each panel member was asked to prioritize the most important ideas of the day and rank them one through three. The topics for panel members to rank were:

- Measure response bias
- Front load cases
- Get phone numbers in advance
- Use thank-you notes
- Hold a response rate summit with FRs
- Add extra weekend to NHIS
- Collect call record data
- Change caseload for NHIS
- Estimate effect of clustering on response rate for CE
- Convert NHIS to biweekly/monthly
- Determine optimal call-back patterns
- Re-engineer initial contact
- Experiment with respondent incentives
- Provide bonus for full completions
- Give small incentive up front/more to come
- Provide FR incentives
- Conduct refusal aversion training (RAT)
- Determine critical item completions to decrease refusals (redefine sufficient partials)
- Reorder NHIS to move income to end
- Identify and analyze noncontacts vs. refusals
- Develop organizational skills for FRs
- Coordinate HQ sampling and FR workload

The panel members ranked these ideas as follows:

Table 1: Panel Member's Rankings

	Ranking		
*Panel Member**	1st	2nd	3rd
Eleanor Singer	Call records	RAT	—
Bob Groves	Call records	Incentives	RAT
David Cantor	Call records	Extra weekend (HIS)	—
Brian Williams	Call Records	RAT	Change HIS to bi-weekly/monthly
Ed Cohen	Incentives	RAT	Adjust HIS sample
Graham Kalton	Call records	Change HIS caseload	Incentives
Paul Biemer	Call records	Incentives	RAT
Roger Tourangeau	Call records	Reengineer advance contact	Incentives
Clyde Tucker	Call records	Non-response aversion training	Non-response bias measurement

* Paul Lavrakas and Dan Kasprzyk were unable to attend Day 2 of the Summit.

In conclusion, the recommendations by the panel (in order of importance) are as follows:

1. **Collect and analyze detailed contact/call record data.** Use of these data is twofold: (1) for analytic purposes, and (2) feedback mechanism for ROs and FRs. Devise an automated system to capture case histories—including number of contacts, interim outcomes (outcome of each contact/attempt), reasons for refusals, day of week and time of contact/attempt, and demographics of refusal/noncontact households. Use this information to better discern between refusals and noncontact, develop an interview history of tracts, design targeted materials, and understand motivations for noncooperation. Use call record data to identify and aid FRs having problems. Look at reasons for refusal by demographics (e.g., age, sex). Determine optimal callback patterns.

2. **Refusal aversion training.** This training promotes a transfer of skills used by the very best interviewers. It gives FRs a strong knowledge of the survey and explains specific concerns that reluctant respondents have. It teaches FRs how to listen for these concerns and immediately counter them. The panel recommended expanding the use of this training method beyond the experiment conducted in the NHIS. We should use the model that allows SFRs in the regions to administer the training. We should continue to track interview-level response rates to further refine the training and test whether the training has a diminishing effect over time.

3. **Incentives.** We should conduct experiments with the CE and NHIS to explore unconditional incentives. The incentives do not necessarily have to be monetary but should be survey-specific.
   - Provide respondent bonus for full compliance (complete entire diary, complete all parts of survey, etc.)
   - Provide up-front monetary incentive with promise of more to come if they cooperate (experiment)
   - OMB will require that we conduct experiments before approving anything for production.

4. **Change in sample design/caseload.** The NHIS should experiment with a monthly or biweekly sample design and/or expanding the interview period to include a third weekend. NHIS could also spread out the caseload. For the CE, consider using a clustered sample design—estimate clustering on response rates. Redesign coordination of sampling and workload.

5. **Redesign the advance letter and other materials.**

   - Total “re-think”.
   - Should letter be from the sponsor or Census Bureau? (conduct experiment)
   - Develop a colorful brochure with FAQs. Move the privacy statements, legal requirements, etc. out of advance letter and into the brochure. Simplify the advance letter. (conduct experiment)
   - Better present the confidentiality/privacy statements so respondents do not become overly alarmed and a backlash ensues.

- Personalization of letter.
- Include business card of FR in letter?
- Use FedEx/priority mail?
- Tailor letter to anticipated objections, interests (e.g., if elderly community use Social Security benefits as justification for conducting the survey).
- Use multiple advance letters.
- Send from headquarter or from regions? (conduct experiment)
- Does it make a difference if household acknowledges getting the letter? (conduct experiment)

6. **Frontload cases.** Gather information about the physical characteristics of cases during listing or immediately after sample is drawn. Use this information to assign cases (e.g., contact cases in urban areas, high-rises, gated communities early in the field period). Use FASTDATA and/or Census 2000 to obtain phone numbers and make advance calls before visiting. Conduct experiments to see if this reduces nonresponse and time in the field.

Survey Specific Suggestions

Survey specific revisions suggested included the following:

NHIS

- Create a fifth sample of monthly respondents to compare to four weekly samples.
- Have the first self-respondent answer the household survey.
- Have differential sample probabilities for adults present at time of interview.
- Move income questions to the end of the adult questionnaire to eliminate response bias:
  - Why does NHIS lose 4% of respondents to adult Q when the same respondent answers both household and adult surveys?
  - Hypothesis 1 → the last questions on household survey are on income. Respondents don't want to answer these and then decide to bag rest of interview.
  - Hypothesis 2 → Could also be switch from household Q to adult Q.
  - Solution to Hypothesis 1 → Maybe move household income questions to end of adult questionnaire when household and adult respondent are the same person?
  - Confounding factor → Would moving income questions to end of adult questionnaire change the answers respondents give?

CEQ

- Consider clustering by geography, since travel costs are a big problem.
- Find a more consistent way to identify tenure, race, and family size other than field representative observation.

AGENDA
RESPONSE RATE SUMMIT
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U.S. Census Bureau and the Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group
February 21 - 22, 2002
Crystal City Marriott, Salon F, 2nd Floor

Thursday, 2/21:

8:15 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Introductions and Summit Goals .... *N. Bates, C. Tucker, Panel Members*
9:30 a.m.	Overview of the Current NHIS Sample Design and Plans for the 2005 Redesign.................... *T. Ezzati-Rice*
10:30 a.m.	BREAK
10:30 a.m.	Overview of Response Rates in the NHIS .... *H. Riddick* NHIS Response Rates: Influences and Interventions .... *A. Oneto*
12:00 p.m.	LUNCH
1:15 p.m.	Overview of the Consumer Expenditure Survey .... *S. Groves* Characteristics of CE Quarterly's Nonresponders: Who are They? ..... *D. Swanson* CE Sampling and Methodology .... *S. Johnson-Herring*
2:15 p.m.	CEQ Field Methodology and Procedures .... *R. Watkins, K. Frahn*
3:00 p.m.	BREAK
3:15 p.m.	CEQ Field Procedure (cont.).................... *R. Watkins, K. Frahn*
4:00 p.m.	Q and A about surveys Begin discussion topics for Day II
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN
6:30 p.m.	Panel Group dinner at Portofino Restaurant (Crystal City)

<u>Friday, 2/22:</u>

8:15 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Q and A from Day 1 (cont.)
9:30 a.m.	Brainstorming ways to reduce/study nonresponse: *(Suggested topic areas - subject to change)* • Introduction and conversion techniques/interviewer training • Noncontacts vs. Refusals
10:30 a.m.	BREAK
10:45 a.m.	Brainstorming ways to reduce/study nonresponse (cont.): *(Subject to change)* • Attrition (CEQ) • Sampling within Household (NHIS)
12:00 p.m.	LUNCH
1:15 p.m.	Brainstorming and general discussion (cont.): *(Subject to change)* • Nonresponse Bias • Reducing Burden – Changes to Survey Design or Questionnaire
3:00 p.m.	BREAK
3:15 p.m.	Prioritize ideas/recommendations: Recap and Summary
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN

Overview of the Current (1995-2004) NHIS Sample
(presentation slides)

Overview of Response Rates in the NHIS
(presentation slides)

Response Rates – Influences and Interventions (NHIS)
(presentation slides)

Characteristics of The Consumer Expenditure Quarterly's Nonresponders: Who Are They?
(presentation slides)

CE Sampling and Methodology
(presentation slides)