

STUDY SERIES
(*Survey Methodology #2013-16*)

**Cognitive Testing of Modified American Community
Survey Envelopes and Letters for Use during the
2010 Census: ACS Messaging Project Final Report
on Phases 1 and 2**

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Report Issued: June 6, 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second of two reports on the development and cognitive testing of modified messages on American Community Survey (ACS) envelopes, letters, and a flyer in 2009 for use in 2010 during the massive 2010 Census advertising campaign and mobilization. The aim of the overall project was to develop new messages to mitigate, or at least reduce, an anticipated decline, similar to that seen during Census 2000, in ACS mail return rates for households in 2010 that would receive mailings to complete both the ACS and the census questionnaires.

This report presents results of two phases of development and cognitive testing of experimental messages on envelopes and letters in the ACS prenotice and initial and replacement questionnaire packages. The messages in the letters informed respondents that the ACS is separate from the census, is used for different purposes, and that response to both the ACS and the census is mandatory. In Phase 1, we also developed and tested new envelopes with the survey name, “THE American Community Survey,” in a new green text box centered above the address window to distinguish the ACS materials from 2010 Census materials, for use during 2010 when some households would receive both the ACS and the census materials.

We aimed to learn if the envelopes and letters were effective in distinguishing the ACS from the census questionnaires and in conveying the message that respondents were required to complete both. We asked respondents how likely they would be to complete and return both forms to assess initial reactions on the effectiveness of the revised materials in promoting response. During this initial testing, we noted that a number of cognitive respondents had not heard of the ACS, some thought the ACS materials might not be from the government and some said they might not be likely to open and complete it if they received it in the mail.

These initial results suggested this approach of separating the ACS from the census was not working as well as had been hoped in potentially increasing ACS response. As a result, we decided to stop testing midstream and redesign the envelopes to link them clearly to the Census Bureau to legitimize this survey as a government-sponsored data collection. We did this by revising the envelope—adding into the toned-down green text box the words, “U.S. Census Bureau” above “THE American Community Survey”—and then conducted a second round of testing with a different set of respondents. Phase 1 in this report refers to the initial round with the first set of materials and Phase 2 refers to the second round with testing of the revised envelopes. Phase 3 refers to the later development and testing of a flyer for use during the final personal visit operation (Schwede and Sorokin 2009a).

The addition of “U.S. Census Bureau” above the survey name did appear to increase the legitimacy of the American Community Survey for some Phase 2 respondents who had not previously heard of this survey. All but one of the respondents said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to complete and mail an ACS form if they got one in the mail while they were also receiving census forms to complete. This was confirmed when

half of our respondents mentioned that if the agency name had not been included in the text box, they might have been less likely to open the envelope and complete the survey.

The green color had mixed results. Results suggested it was more noticeable than the 2010 Census form with which it was tested, but less official than that form. While most respondents liked the green, there were mixed results on whether the green, or a third color in general, would make the questionnaire more effective or not. The letters worked well and we did not make changes to them for Phase 2.

One notable finding involved associations between the way that respondents took the five items out of the ACS envelope (from the front with the questionnaire on top or not) and their likeliness to find and read the cover letter in the questionnaire package. During Phase 1 observations, we noticed two patterns in how respondents removed the five inserts from the questionnaire packages. First, about two-thirds of the respondents opened the package from the front of the envelope, pulling out the stack with the questionnaire on top, while the remaining third opened the envelope from the back flap to see the back of the return envelope on top. Those who opened the questionnaire package from the front during the testing focused on the questionnaire on top and were less likely to find and read the experimental letter among the other inserts than those who started from the back of the envelope and moved down the stack of inserts to see the letter before getting to the questionnaire. There appeared to be a substantial difference between the two groups in likelihood to find and read the letter with the key messages we were trying to convey to respondents.

While this sample was very small and purposive and caution should be taken in drawing conclusions from these results, the same patterns and associations were observed again with different respondents in both Phases 2 and 3 of this project (Schwede and Sorokin 2010). Consistent results like this across three rounds of cognitive testing suggested that there might be a problem in finding the letter among the five ACS inserts when respondents pull the questionnaire out on top of the stack as they remove them from the envelope. This suggested that we consider reordering the five inserts in the envelope to make the letters more likely to be seen and read. At the request of the American Community Survey Office, the ACS processors tried to rearrange the materials in the envelope but this caused machine jams so the five inserts remained in the same order in 2010.

A later split-panel test of the experimental letters and envelopes was conducted within the American Community Survey production data collection from January to November, 2010 during the 2010 Census advertising environment (Chesnut and Davis, 2011). Two experimental envelopes were tested: one with the green text box background developed in this project and a new hybrid version with the same wording within the box, but no green color (the “no-color” version). The experimental envelope format with “U.S. Census Bureau” and “THE American Community Survey” enclosed within a text box above the window in the ACS questionnaire package letters achieved significantly higher mail response rates than the standard ACS envelopes in 2010 used as the control. The new hybrid no-color version had a greater increase in the mail response rate than the

green version did, but both had significantly higher response rates than the standard ACS control envelope. The experimental letters also increased participation significantly. The best combination was the no-color experimental white envelopes paired with the experimental letters, which significantly raised response rates in 2010 before, during, and after the peak of census operations, which were from March to May, 2010 (Chesnut and Davis 2011: 8) During the census and post-census periods of the split-panel test in 2010, the majority of the ACS production sample had been allocated to the new letter and no-color version, so the mail response rate gains applied to the majority of the actual ACS production sample. From the results of the test, it appeared that the ACS in 2010 interdisciplinary working group's goal of at least mitigating the effects of the census environment on ACS response in 2010 had been achieved.

1. INTRODUCTION ¹

This is the second of two reports describing results from three separate phases of cognitive testing conducted with American Community Survey (ACS) materials developed and tested for use during the massive 2010 Census advertising campaign and mobilization. This research was part of the wider ACS Messaging Project, which was established to develop and test new ACS messages in letters and envelopes and on a flyer to attempt to maintain, or at least mitigate the potential decline of, ACS response rates during the 2010 Census environment (Davis and Tancreto 2008). During Census 2000, ACS mail check-in rates fluctuated during the year. They increased between five and ten percentage points from January to March during the height of the Census 2000 advertising campaign and before the census forms were mailed out in mid-March, possibly because ACS respondents may have mistakenly thought they were completing the census form. In the peak census period of April, however, ACS check-in rates declined by about seven percentage points when respondents had both ACS and census forms to complete. From May to December 2000, the ACS check-in rates declined another one to two percentage points before pulling up again somewhat at the end of the year (Raglin: unpublished data).

This cognitive testing research was developed and conducted in 2008 and 2009 in consultation and collaboration with the ACS Messaging Project Working Group. Members of this group were from the following Census Bureau divisions and offices: American Community Survey Office (ACSO), Decennial Statistical Studies Division (DSSD), Decennial Management Division (DMD), Field Division (FLD), Population Division (POP) and Statistical Research Division (SRD).

This report presents results of Phases 1 and 2 cognitive testing with modified messages on envelopes and letters in the ACS prenotice, initial questionnaire package, and replacement questionnaire package. These messages were developed to inform respondents that the ACS is separate from the census, is used for different purposes, and that responses to both the ACS and the census are mandatory. We aimed to learn if the envelopes and letters were effective in distinguishing the ACS from the census mail materials and in conveying the message that respondents were required to complete both. As our aim was to promote ACS response by mail during 2010, we assessed potential effectiveness of the revised materials by asking respondents in debriefings how likely they would be to complete and return both forms if they received these materials at home.

¹ The author wishes to thank two former colleagues for their contributions to this project. Anissa Sorokin assisted in questionnaire development, conducted and analyzed interviews in all three phases, and contributed to the analysis for this report. She also co-authored several papers on this project (2009a, 2009b, 2010). She left the Census Bureau in 2010. The author also thanks former colleague, Matthew Clifton, for conducting some of the Phase 2 interviews and for his contributions to our findings. The author also thanks Debra Klein, Yuling Pan, Theresa DeMaio, Tony Tersine, Todd Hughes, and Mary Davis for reviews of earlier versions of this report.

Findings from the early interviews suggested this approach was not working as well as had been hoped; we halted testing midstream to revise the envelopes to make a more explicit link to the Census Bureau to increase the legitimacy of the survey. We then tested the new envelopes in a second round that became known as Phase 2, to differentiate the interviews with the revised materials from those with the initial materials. Because the timing was very tight for finalizing the materials in time for use in 2010, we focused on cognitive testing of the revised ACS envelopes, though we present a few results on the letters, which remained unchanged across the two phases.

An earlier report describes the results of Phase 3 cognitive testing conducted to analyze the design and efficacy of a flyer intended for use by field representatives attempting to conduct face-to-face ACS interviews with mail non-responders during the 2010 Census year (Schwede and Sorokin 2009a).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Problem and Alternative Approaches

The ACS was a relatively new stand-alone survey that grew out of, and replaced, the census long form in past censuses. This would be the first decennial census without a long form; the 2010 Census was advertised as ten questions in ten minutes. This would also be the first census in which the ACS was fully implemented and provided estimates for the entire country.

The ACS and the 2010 Census share some features. Both data collections are sponsored by the Census Bureau under the same authority, with mandated participation, and basically the same return address, save for a different zip code. It would be easy for some ACS respondents in 2010 to think from the similarity of the messages, addresses, and materials that these were the same data collection and ignore one or the other as a duplicate.

At least some respondents in households that would be randomly selected to participate in the ACS from March, 2010 onward would notice that the ACS starts out asking for answers to the exact same basic demographic questions that they saw on the 2010 Census form in a very similar person page format. Some unknown number of respondents might balk at the burden of being asked to complete the same information again, as well as answer the additional ACS questions in the much longer ACS booklet. Conversely, some ACS respondents receiving ACS forms from January to March might mistake their ACS form for the census form and then regard the census form arriving later in March as redundant, and not submit the census form.

With the ACS data collection and processing systems running separately and independently from those of the decennial census, those randomly selected to participate in the ACS during the decennial census year would need to complete both the census and ACS forms. They would be providing some of the same data twice.

The ACS Messaging Working Group members discussed these issues and recognized the problem the ACS faces in decennial census years: many respondents would receive both the census and the ACS forms around the same general time and might balk at completing two forms: some might decide to complete just one. In cases where they received both forms around the same time, it would be more likely for respondents to choose to complete the better-known census form, as it is clearly much shorter and would take substantially less time to complete, and decide not to complete the ACS form. There was also a concern that some persons faced with both might not submit their census forms, posing a potential risk to 2010 Census response rates.

As a result, the ACS Messaging Working Group identified two potential alternative approaches to modifying the ACS messages to try to maintain, or at least staunch the decline of, ACS response rates in 2010 while not affecting the 2010 Census response. The first messaging approach would be to link the ACS closely to the census, since there would be a strong advertising campaign for the census and the ACS response rates might improve through close association with the census. However, close linkage to the census could lead more respondents to compare the forms and choose to do just the census form to fulfill their civic duty. This could reduce ACS response rates.

The second approach would be to de-emphasize the linkage to the census and make the American Community Survey seem more independent of the census, to strengthen the message that the ACS and census forms both needed to be completed and mailed in. However, there was a concern that de-emphasizing the census link might result in fewer respondents recognizing the importance of the ACS data collection and declining to complete the ACS.

The Working Group consulted with the Census Advisory Committee of Professional Association members from the American Marketing Association. We then chose to go with the approach of not emphasizing the connections between the ACS and the 2010 Census in developing the messages on the envelopes for cognitive testing.

2.2 Revised Envelopes and Letters Developed for Testing

This approach was reflected in the revised ACS envelopes and letters that we developed and tested for use later during the 2010 Census year. Because the ACS was still relatively new, we needed some means of conveying on the envelope that the ACS was different from the census. As noted earlier, the return addresses and some administrative messages on the envelope were virtually identical. Also virtually identical in format was the mandatory message enclosed in a black box on the side that had been found to be one of the most effective elements for raising response rates, by about 10 percent (Dillman, Clark and Treat 1994; summary in Dillman 2007). Given these limitations, the working group consulted with the Advisory Committee members from the American Marketing Association, who specifically recommended the use of color on the ACS envelopes. The working group decided that a color text box might be the best means of enabling respondents to distinguish the ACS materials from the census materials quickly.

We knew of only a few Census Bureau studies of using color on census and/or ACS envelopes and other mailers. At the time we were planning this study, we had just completed cognitive testing on another project of a second experimental reminder card to send to ACS households that had not responded to the first or second mailout questionnaire and for whom we had no phone numbers. That overall project aim was to develop and test one additional reminder card and one additional experimental replacement package cover letter and questionnaire to try to get those mail nonresponders to respond by mail before beginning the much more expensive personal visit interview phase of ACS data collection. Large, medium green reminder cards with a mix of “carrot” and “stick” messages worked well in cognitive testing, as did a new additional letter and replacement questionnaire package (Schwede 2008a, Chesnut and Schwede, 2011). During the cognitive debriefings, respondents preferred green to white or salmon cards with the same message (Schwede 2008b).

Based on the cognitive results from that prior study, we decided to use a combination of “carrot” and “stick” messages in the letters on this project and incorporate a small amount of green color onto the envelopes. The medium green color we used on the ACS envelopes² was just a few shades lighter than the medium green color used on the postcards in that previous test.

Two related projects had been done previously. In the 1986 National Content Test, two envelopes were tested against each other as part of a larger mailout of short and long census forms to a sample of expired rotation groups in the National Crime Survey. One was an “official” envelope with black lettering on a white envelope while the other was a “commercial” envelope designed by an outside graphic artist to be attractive and appealing. It included: 1) a picture of a flag on the left side of the envelope with red and blue ink; 2) the return address in blue ink; and 3) a statement in red ink above the flag, “This is an official United States Census form for this household.” The “official” envelope achieved a mail return rate about two percentage points higher than the “commercial” envelope that was statistically significant and consistent across form types (DeMaio 1988).

In the 1996 National Content Survey, response rates of the “Public Information Design” approach (gold respondent-friendly questionnaires in gold envelopes with a coordinated slogan) were compared with the “Official Government” approach (green respondent-

² Later, the additional postcard, additional replacement package and cover letter, and a control group with no additional mailings in that former project were included in a split-panel test in the March 2009 ACS production panel. The results of that test showed that both the large green postcard and the additional replacement questionnaire package improved the mail response rate over that of the control group (Chesnut 2010). While the test did not allow isolation of the effects of the green color from the large size of the postcard or just the additional piece of mail, the results of that split-panel test suggested at the minimum that the green color of the mailing helped, or at least did not harm, ACS mail response rates.

friendly questionnaires in plain white envelopes with the mandatory message). The “Official Government” approach achieved higher response rates (Leslie 1996). After that time, the Bureau appeared to have stopped research on using colors on mailers until the postcard study cited above and the new discussions by the ACS Messaging Project Working Group in 2008.

The new feature that we added to the ACS envelopes for this cognitive testing was the enclosure of the survey name, “THE American Community Survey,” within a new shaded green box outlined by a black border. The shade of green used in the box was approximately the shade of the ACS questionnaire itself to give a unified appearance to the envelope and questionnaire. This box was centered above the window in the envelope. The ACS prenotice envelope included just this survey name box, centered above the window, with both offset to the left of the envelope (see Appendix B.4, page 48). The questionnaire package envelope included this box centered above the window in the center of the envelope, with another shaded green box on the left with the mandatory message (Appendix B.5, page 48). In the upper left corner, the ACS envelopes included the same five official address lines as on the census envelopes, except for a different zip code. Below those lines were one administrative notice and the ACS form number. The remaining administrative message, “An Equal Opportunity Employer” was located in the top center of the ACS envelopes, rather than on the left under the other messages, as on the census envelopes.

In contrast, the 2010 Census envelopes were white with black lettering, with a large and bold logo, “United StatesTM Census 2010” prominently centered in the upper middle part of the envelope. In the upper left corner, five lines of the official return address are followed by two required administrative notices and the census form identification number. The census prenotice envelope (Appendix A.4, page 43) had the large census logo centered near the top of the envelope above the right side of envelope window, with the small, pale blue prenotice letter inside. The census questionnaire package envelope included the centered logo with the window partially under it and offset to the right side, as well as a mandatory message in a white box outlined in black on the left side, under the address (Appendix A.5, page 43). That package included the initial cover letter, the light blue, 6-page foldout mail questionnaire booklet (one 11 inch by 26 inch piece of paper folded twice), and a return envelope. The census replacement questionnaire package included a light blue letter, as well as the same questionnaire and return envelope.

We developed three ACS letters on white paper with the Census Bureau letterhead from the Census Bureau Director. These included: the prenotice letter (Appendix B.1, page 45); the cover letter for the initial questionnaire package (Appendix B.2, page 46); and the cover letter for the replacement questionnaire package to be sent three weeks later if a response had not yet been received (Appendix B.3, page 47). The letters emphasize the modified messages that 1) the ACS is related to the Census, but separate from it; 2) the respondent was selected randomly in the ACS sample; and 3) the respondent was required by law to complete both the ACS and the 2010 Census forms. The comparable

2010 Census prenotice, initial questionnaire package and replacement questionnaire package cover letters are included in Appendix A.1 to A.3, pages 40-42.

Consistent with past ACS practices, each of the ACS letters contained messages about the benefits of the ACS data in planning for and funding new infrastructure and services. We varied the wording and bolding of text across the letters in the messages noting that response to both the ACS and the census was mandatory. The prenotice letter contained the message, “Your response to **both** is required by law.” The initial package cover letter used the same words but bolded the entire line: “**Your response to both is required by law.**” The replacement package letter used different wording, “**Answering both is important and is required by law.**” The letter sent in the replacement package also included a statement that a representative might contact them by phone or personal visit to do an interview if the form was not submitted. Parts of these messages came from testing of “carrot” and “stick” messages on the reminder cards from a previous test cited earlier, particularly, the statement that a field representative might come to the house if the form were not sent in. Most cognitive respondents had said they would send in the form to avoid the prospect of someone coming to their house unannounced to interview them (Schwede 2008a and 2008b).

The ACS prenotice envelope included just the letter. The initial and replacement ACS questionnaire packages included standard inserts. Next to the envelope window was the 28-page green and white questionnaire with black ink, positioned so that the address label printed on the top front of the folded questionnaire showed through the window. Behind that was the cover letter, folded, and with the top half-visible, so that when the questionnaire was set aside, the cover letter text would face the respondent. The third insert was a white instruction guide printed with blue ink to help respondents answer the ACS questions. The fourth was a brightly colored glossy “Frequently Asked Questions” brochure. The fifth and final insert was the large white return envelope, with the printed side facing inward in the envelope, and upside down. When the ACS envelope is opened from the back, the first thing one saw was the blank bottom backside of the return envelope.

The only package inserts we were officially testing in this project were the ACS cover letters, but the positioning of the other documents was later observed to be associated with whether the initial questionnaire package cover letter was found and read or not. We asked some probing questions about the census materials to give the respondents the impression we were treating both census and ACS materials the same, but our scope was limited to analyzing and presenting cognitive testing results on the ACS materials themselves and on respondent comparisons of both the ACS and the census materials.

3. METHODOLOGY

Since a main objective of the project was to develop materials that would maintain, or at least minimize reductions to, existing mail return rates in the intense 2010 Census environment, we aimed to recruit, for cognitive testing, types of respondents who would

be likely to respond to mail surveys. To that end, we identified characteristics of 2005 ACS mail responders, which included persons living with a spouse, living in a single unit, and/or owning their residences

We designed our cognitive testing to simulate, as much as possible within one interview, a scenario that might lead a respondent to be least likely to respond to the ACS. This scenario is the situation a person selected for the ACS would face at home during March and April, 2010, during the height of the census advertising campaign when first the census, then the ACS mailings, would start arriving and continue interspersed over seven to eight weeks, according to the following schedule. We presented the respondent with each of the eight Census and ACS mailings in the sequence in which they would arrive in 2010:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1) 2010 Census prenotice letter | March 7, 2010 |
| 2) 2010 Census initial questionnaire package | March 16, 2010 |
| 3) ACS prenotice letter | March 18, 2010 |
| 4) ACS initial questionnaire package | March 22, 2010 |
| 5) 2010 Census reminder postcard | March 23, 2010 |
| 6) ACS reminder postcard | March 25, 2010 |
| 7) 2010 Census replacement questionnaire package | April 6, 2010 |
| 8) ACS replacement questionnaire package | April 22, 2010 |

In the one cognitive testing session, we presented the respondent with each of the eight Census and ACS mailings in that sequence. To avoid overburdening respondents, we did not ask them to complete the forms.

The focus of our cognitive testing was on the ACS materials: the prenotice and initial and replacement questionnaire package envelopes and cover letters. So as not to disclose our special focus on the ACS messages, we also probed on some aspects of the census mailings and asked some additional debriefing questions that compared census and ACS materials. The 2010 census letters are shown in Appendix A.1 to A.3 and the corresponding prenotice and questionnaire package envelopes are shown in A.4 and A.5. In this report, we present just those findings relevant to our ACS research questions.

As mentioned, we aimed to learn if the envelopes and letters were effective in distinguishing the ACS and the Census questionnaires and in conveying the message that respondents were required to complete both. We also asked respondents how likely they would be to complete and return both forms, to assess the effectiveness of the messages in motivating respondents to respond.

During the testing, we began by handing respondents the “mailings” one at a time and asking them to handle the materials as if they were at home and had received them in the mail, but to tell us what they were doing and thinking. We quietly observed how respondents interacted with each of the first four mailings successively: the census prenotice and initial questionnaire package, then the ACS prenotice and initial questionnaire package. After the fourth envelope, we stopped to ask non-directive open-

ended retrospective probes on what they had noticed and reacted to in the first four mailings and whether they would be likely to open the materials if they received them in the mail.

Next, we switched back to observation only as we presented the remaining four mailings: the census then ACS reminder postcards, then the census and ACS replacement questionnaire packages. We followed up with directed probes about the mailings. Key questions included whether the respondents thought the census envelope or the ACS envelope was more noticeable, then more official, and whether or not they would be likely to open the ACS questionnaire envelopes. We asked how they felt about the green color or a third color on the ACS initial package envelope. We also asked about the ACS letters, what they noticed in the letters, how they interpreted the experimental text, and how likely they would be to complete and mail in the ACS questionnaire. We invited them to suggest improvements. Appendix G contains the protocol that guided the Phase 1 interviews.

As noted earlier, we followed the approach of de-emphasizing the connection between the 2010 Census and the ACS and included just the American Community Survey name in the green text box on the envelopes. We were concerned that if we emphasized the connection, we would increase the number of ACS respondents who would say that they would only complete one of the two forms—the shorter Census 2010 form—and that could lead to a decline in ACS response rates.

4. LIMITATIONS

The results from this cognitive testing are based on very small, purposively selected samples of respondents whose characteristics suggested they might be more likely to respond to a mailout survey. Phase 1 included 19 respondents and Phase 2 included ten. While these small samples aided us in identifying problems with the first set of materials and revising them in the second, the results should not be viewed as representative of any larger or different group. The sample sizes were selected based on past cognitive interviewing experience, staffing, costs, and time available.

An additional limitation is that the cognitive testing situation differed from the actual situation that would occur in respondents' homes in 2010 in terms of duration between "mailings." In the real situation in March and April, 2010, the arrival of the eight successive mailings would be spread out over seven to eight weeks. In the cognitive testing, it was not feasible or cost-effective to do eight successive cognitive sessions with each of the 19 respondents. We conducted one cognitive interview with each respondent, presenting all eight "mailings" sequentially. After seeing the fourth successive "mailing," some respondents said they were getting tired of getting so many materials and became less attentive, not paying full attention to the ACS questionnaire packages and letters. That was a function of the cognitive testing situation that does not necessarily affect how well the messaging itself worked.

5. FINDINGS: PHASE 1

We recruited such respondents from our existing respondent database and from postings on www.craigslist.org and conducted 19 interviews in our lab and at places more convenient to respondents in the Washington, DC metropolitan area in the fall of 2008. Fourteen were female, two were male and three were not recorded by sex. Respondents were White and African American.

5.1 ACS Prenotice Envelope

As mentioned earlier, in the cognitive testing, we presented respondents with the series of census and ACS “mailing” materials in the order they would receive them in 2010 during the census and ACS overlap months of March and April. After handing them the census prenotice and then the initial questionnaire package, we gave them the third “mailing”: the ACS prenotice envelope (Appendix B.4, page 44). During the observation-only stage, we noted that four appeared to read it, five seemed to scan it and another five glanced at it, while four did not look at it; the remaining respondent was not observed. When asked later if they had looked at it, 16 said yes, one said, “Not really, it’s the same as the other thing, you know, it’s an official government thing,” and the last did not remember.

When asked later if they had noticed anything in particular on this envelope, the answer given by 13 respondents was “American Community Survey,” as shown in Table 1, followed by the green color, and “Department of Commerce” and “Census Bureau” in the return address. Some respondents gave multiple answers so the count of answers is higher than the number of respondents.

Table 1. Features Respondents Reported Noticing on ACS Prenotice Envelope when Probed

Feature	Number of Respondents
“American Community Survey” text	13
Green Color	8
“Department of Commerce” text	6
“Census Bureau” text	4

This does not necessarily imply that respondents were familiar with the survey. Five indicated at this point that they did not know what that was. Here are some selected comments:

“The American Community Survey? That makes me a little leery. What is it? It could be anything. You should highlight Department of Commerce. This looks personal. A guy wants to get something from me...”

“American Community Survey – what is that? “American” is intimidating for non-Americans. Green – okay...We who don’t like to waste time may not read it...I tend to do cursory looks. The color got my attention. I didn’t make out immediately it was from the U.S. Census Bureau.”

A few who said they noticed the Department of Commerce in the address were not sure what that was:

“Department of Commerce. I had no clue what that is (then she saw mention of the Census Bureau a few lines down).

“I would do a cursory look at the envelope and notice US Department of Commerce. That would flag my attention. If I got something from someone or some entity I don’t know, I’d get rid of it. I don’t have time. That’s awful, isn’t it? If I saw Department of Commerce, I would guess it is junk.”

There was mixed reaction to the green color. Two said they liked the color and several said it was an eye catcher. Another, however, thought it did not look as official as the census envelope and another said:

“Right away, seeing this green, I knew then that it was that fluke stuff again, them just bein’ nosy. ‘Cause I just can’t see them putting the American Community Survey in green, out there like that. ‘Cause if it was that important, they wouldn’t of took time to put the American Community....It don’t say nothing about census up here, or anything. This is more like an advertisement.”

5.2 ACS Prenotice Letter

We observed and documented respondent behavior as they handled the letter within the prenotice envelope. Ten of the 19 respondents appeared to read the letter, some of them aloud, while six seemed to scan it, and three gave it a quick glance. One of those who just gave it a quick glance did not realize that this mailing differed from the two prior census mailings she had just scanned. She said,

“I’m confused. In a few days, I will get it. I would get rid of this because I sent it in” [she is irritated by this, but is distracted by activities nearby-this interview was not conducted in the lab].

Another needed a moment to realize this was something else: “My first thought is something else from the census. Did they not know I did it? [She looks again at the envelope] Now I realize I have both.”

We recorded the respondents’ spontaneous comments about the letter to see what, if anything, they focused on, particularly in terms of our key messages: 1) some households, including yours, will receive both; 2) you must do both; and 3) this is required by law. Thirteen of the 19 volunteered comments relevant to our key messages.

Table 2 shows the number of mentions of key features (some respondents volunteered more than one comment).

Table 2. Respondents' Spontaneous Comments on Features of the ACS Prenotice Letter

Volunteered comments on letter features	Number of Respondents
You will get both questionnaires	8
The ACS survey is coming	7
Mandatory message: required by law	6

At the end of the session, we showed respondents this ACS prenotice letter and asked them directly if they had noticed anything about it when they first received it. Their answers are shown in Table 3 below and differ somewhat from their spontaneous comments. There were slightly fewer comments about getting both questionnaires and the impending arrival of the ACS form, but more about the mandatory requirement to complete the forms. One respondent thought this meant “they are going to send the census out” while another just read the first sentence and said the rest is irrelevant.

Table 3. Features Respondents Reported Noticing on the ACS Prenotice Letter when Probed

Features	Number of Respondents
You will get both questionnaires	6
The ACS survey is coming	3
Mandatory message: required by law	8
Department of Commerce	2

Most of the respondents seemed to understand this letter as saying that the ACS questionnaire would arrive in the mail soon and they would need to complete and return it, though one thought this was referring to the census form.

5.3 ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Envelope

As respondents continued to receive mailings, we observed how they handled the successive envelopes. The initial ACS questionnaire package envelope (Appendix B.4, page 48) is the fourth they received and it was clear that respondents were beginning to wonder why they were getting so many envelopes. Some seemed to be paying less attention to them. Some of their impatience or resignation was likely due to the way we structured the cognitive testing situation, showing respondents each of the eight mailings in one sitting.

Two respondents appeared to read the front of the initial package envelope, four scanned it, eight just glanced at it and five did not look at it. Later when we asked them to recall if they had looked at it or not, 14 said yes, two said a little bit, one said “Not really: it’s the inside that counts.” The remaining two did not remember. The last said she looked at it and “it woulda went right in the junk mail.”

Table 4 shows what respondents said they noticed about the questionnaire package envelope, in rank order: with the green color mentioned by nine respondents, with

somewhat fewer for American Community Survey, the mandatory message, and just one for the Department of Commerce. Some gave more than one answer.

Table 4. Features Respondents Reported Noticing on the ACS Questionnaire Package Envelope when Probed

Features noticed in the ACS package envelope	Number of Respondents
Green color	9
“American Community Survey”	8
“Mandatory message: required by law”	6
“Department of Commerce”	1

5.4 ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Letter

As noted earlier, the letter was sandwiched into the envelope as the second insert of five inserts as they are pulled from the front of the envelope: questionnaire, letter, brochure, guide, and return envelope (upside down). We were able to record how 17 of our 19 respondents opened the envelope. By watching while they were reading and listening closely to comments they made about key features of the letter, we noted that just five of the 17 respondents appeared to read the letter, while one scanned it and appeared to read the key text. Another scanned it very quickly; he may or may not have read it. The remaining ten either just glanced at it too quickly to have absorbed the messages or did not read it.

After completing about half of the initial interviews, we noticed a pattern; the way respondents pulled materials from the ACS envelope (questionnaire on top or not) seemed to be associated with whether they found and appeared to read the cover letter in this package.

There were two ways that a respondent could open the package. Respondents could open it from the front or from the back. If the respondent opened the envelope from the front and pulled the materials out as one set, the questionnaire is on top of the stack, followed by the letter and the other three inserts, all facing toward the respondent. If, instead, the respondent turned the package over to open it by pulling open the flap on the backside, he/she pulled out the stack with the blank back of the return envelope on top. He/she either had to flip the stack to have everything face up or had to turn each insert over one at a time to read them. Following the latter course, the respondent would see the letter before seeing the questionnaire.

In Phase 1, eleven of the 19 respondents opened the initial package with the questionnaire on top (Table 5 below). Of those 11, just two clearly read the letter and one scanned it and may or may not have read it. Two others glanced at it and were unlikely to have read anything while the other six did not read it.

In contrast, the other six persons pulled the materials out from the back of the envelope, with the back of the return envelope on top and went through the stack of inserts. Of

those six, three read the letter, one read down through the experimental text, and two did not. Thus, four of the six who opened the package with the back of the letter on top appeared to find the letter and to read the experimental text, compared to just two or three of the 11 who opened it with the questionnaire on top.

Table 5. Position of Questionnaire when Items Removed from Initial Mailing Package by Extent of Cover Letter Reading (by observation): Phase 1

Extent of Cover Letter Reading (observation)	Questionnaire on Top	Questionnaire not on Top	Total
Likely to have read key text			
Read	2	3	5
Scanned, did read key text	-	1	1
May or may not have read			
Scanned, don't know if read	1	-	1
Unlikely to have, or did not read			
Glanced, unlikely to have read	2	-	2
Did not read	6	2	8
Total	11	6	17

In summary, in this round of testing, we noticed that the majority of the 19 respondents in Phase 1 pulled the materials from the initial questionnaire package with the questionnaire on top, but just a few of those found and read the cover letter that included our important messages. In contrast, most of those who opened the envelope from the back found and read the letter.

We recorded and coded the spontaneous statements respondents made concerning the key messages as they looked at the letter: 1) some households including yours will get both the census and the ACS questionnaires; and 2) you are required by law to complete both. The results are documented in Table 6 below. Just four respondents spontaneously said they had noticed the mandatory response notice while three of these four also made a comment indicating they realized they would be required to complete and submit both the census and the ACS questionnaires. As noted above, a substantial portion of the respondents either did not find this letter in the package or did not read or scan it, which helps to explain why these counts are so low. Two were still thinking this second ACS envelope and letter were referring to the census form, so they had not noticed the special ACS features (they are listed as “nonclassifiable response” in Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Respondents’ Spontaneous Comments on Features of the ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Letter (overlap of respondents)

Features	Number of Respondents
Mandatory response	4
Required to do both census and ACS	3
Nonclassifiable response	2

Later in the debriefing, we gave respondents this initial questionnaire package cover letter and asked what, if anything, they had noticed in it. As shown in Table 7, the mandatory message and “both” in bold were mentioned by ten and five of the respondents, respectively. When specifically asked to look at the letter, the woman who was distracted by her husband’s imminent departure finally saw that this is not a repeat of the census messages, but rather a message for a different survey, the ACS. She said:

“When I first got this [letter], I did not read it. Now I see this is a different survey. This seems really long. This looks like the same questions. This did not catch my eye. I saw brochures and commented. I never would’ve seen this. It has to be made very clear up front that these are different. This assumes that undistracted persons are looking at this.”

Table 7. Features Respondents Reported Noticing on the ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Letter when Probed

Features	Number of Respondents
Mandatory message: required by law	10
You will get both questionnaires	5
The ACS survey is coming	1
Comment not classifiable	2

One other respondent commented on the formatting of this letter with the bolded words, **“Answering both is important and is required by U.S. law:**

“That’s strong. It’s kind of like a hit in the head. I’m not sure you’d get as comfortable and full response with that statement as if you would say we appreciate your response to keep economic and statistical data available to help with the economy (or whatever you want to say). If I was a bad guy doing something I really didn’t want to do, I think at this point I might lose the envelope...You’ve gone from the light green color and pretty blues [of the census form] to now plain black, bold type: ‘you are required to do this.’ This is like a dun letter – telling you have bad credit or you are late....This is a forceful letter...It gets to you...It’s a little harsh to receive. People nowadays are unhappy with the government, as you well know... I just say the letter has to be received in a more comfortable tone, whether it’s color, not such a bold type about the law. The fact is Americans are cautious now when you say something about the law. You’re not dunning me, you’re trying to get me to do something, so don’t scare me so I won’t do it.”

The fifth and sixth “mailings” that we handed respondents were the census and ACS reminder postcards to give them the full sequence of mailings they could receive in 2010 in they did not complete and submit the first or replacement questionnaire by the cutoff dates. However, the focus of our testing was on the envelopes and letters. The census replacement questionnaire package was the seventh “mailing.”

5.5 ACS Replacement Questionnaire Package Envelope

This is the eighth and final “mailing” we gave to respondents. We noted that two people had scanned the envelope, four had glanced at it and thirteen admitted they had not looked at it. Three did not even open the package. The respondents were tired of all of the “mailings” and were pulling back from full engagement. One asked, “Where are my Tums?” Another said, “You are sending me the same books – this is disrespect. This makes me question the ACS; you are trying to catch me in a lie (if I sent the first one). Finally one gasped and said,

“I really wouldn’t even take the time to actually open it because I already know what it is.”

A final respondent mentioned his concern that we were using up so much paper and spending so much on postage. The researcher told him that the follow-ups would only be sent if he/she had not sent in the first questionnaire.

5.6 ACS Replacement Questionnaire Package Letter

By this time, most respondents were either tired or annoyed or both at the seven mailings before this last one. As mentioned earlier, we had chosen to conduct the cognitive testing simulating a worst case situation where respondents get the 2010 Census and ACS materials interspersed, though in the actual situation these would be spread out over a number of weeks, rather than in one cognitive testing session. For this cover letter in the last package, we noticed that two respondents read it, two scanned it, six glanced at it, five opened the package but did not look at the letter, and, as mentioned, and three did not see the letter as they did not open the package. The last person had a response that was not codable.

One said wearily, “If I had my choice, I’d do the smaller package [the census form].” Another person who has been suspicious that this survey might be from someone trying to scam her said,

“Well, I might as well go ahead and do it. They’re not gonna let me go! If you don’t answer this then a really nasty person is gonna come to your house and bug you for about a half an hour! Ha ha ha!”

In summary, it is clear that the cognitive respondents had come to recognize the interspersed census and ACS materials and they were getting annoyed and were not paying as much attention to looking at and reading each piece. In a real census, some number of them would fill out and mail the initial questionnaire so they would not receive as many mailings as were included in this testing. One or two of our respondents who initially said they likely would not do it told us they were worn down by the repeated mailings and would complete the questionnaire at some point.

By the end of this testing, we concluded that almost all of our respondents were aware that they were required to complete both the ACS and the census questionnaires. Some had already said they would prefer to do just one of them—the census form, not the ACS questionnaire.

5.7 Comparisons of ACS and 2010 Census Envelopes

After respondents had seen the census and the ACS prenotice and initial questionnaire packages, we asked a few probes to get a sense of how they were reacting to the materials. We asked about the likelihood to open the envelopes and complete and return the questionnaire.

5.7.1. Likelihood to Open the Census and ACS Envelopes

We showed the respondents both the 2010 Census and the ACS questionnaire package envelopes and asked, “Would you be more likely to open one of these envelopes than the other, or would there be no difference?” Fifteen respondents said that if they received these envelopes in the mail, they would likely open both. Four admitted that they would likely only open the census envelope. One said she would open the census envelope over the ACS envelope because the census envelope looked more official. A second respondent said she would likely throw out the ACS envelope unopened because it looked like junk mail to her. Two others did not offer an explanation as to why they would open just the census envelope.

5.7.2 Likelihood to Send Back the Form if Received at Home

We asked respondents, “If you received these same materials in your mail, how likely would you be to complete and return the 2010 Census form on your own? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely?”

Fifteen respondents said they were very likely to return the 2010 Census form, one said “likely,” and three chose “somewhat likely.” None said he or she would be unlikely to mail the census form.

When the same question was asked about likelihood to complete and return the ACS questionnaire, the results were not as positive. Ten said they would be very likely to send it in while three were somewhat likely, two were somewhat unlikely, and three were not likely to do so. The last person just said “required by law,” which did not answer the question. Thus five, perhaps six, said they were somewhat likely or not likely to respond. This was a matter of concern.

When asked about the reason underlying their likelihood to respond, one respondent who answered “not likely” indicated he/she had no interest in it. Another who answered “unlikely” said

“It’s wasting my time. Make it one mailing. This sounds like a quasi-government agency [the Commerce Department]. Maybe a 20-percent chance; depends on if I opened it and realized it’s part of the census. If I could connect it to the census....”

Another said, “It could be someone trying to make money off the survey, not really from the Department of Commerce.”

And one who said she would be somewhat likely said:

“That would, you know, be massive. Once you start getting into it, if you’ve got a lot of kids and stuff, man, that would be like some... [unintelligible]. I’d be waiting for the second envelope, I bet!”

While asking respondents to assess how likely they would be to fill out the ACS form at some future time is hypothetical and may not predict behavior, the results served as a flag that our envelope and letter messages may not have been doing enough to motivate respondents to respond. This raised questions about whether our approach was working.

5.7.3 Noticeability

As noted earlier, one of the main changes we made to the ACS envelopes to try to increase response rates was the use of a third color—green—on the envelopes. After respondents had seen and reacted to all of the forms, we asked directed questions about the features on the forms to assess whether the changes we had made to the ACS envelope were working as intended. We again showed respondents both the census and the ACS envelopes, but this time explicitly pointed out that one (the census envelope) was black and white while the other (the ACS envelope) was black and white but also had two boxes with a green background.

We asked respondents to tell us whether the census or ACS mailing would be more noticeable in a stack of incoming mail or if there was no difference in noticeability. Of the 13 respondents asked this question who gave an adequate answer, eight said the ACS was more noticeable, four said the census was more noticeable and one said there was no difference in terms of noticeability.

5.7.4 Official Appearance

In contrast, when asked if they thought one of the envelopes looked more official than the other or if there was no difference in official appearance, just one said that the ACS envelope looked more official, ten said the census envelope was more official and three said there was no difference. We were somewhat concerned that respondents who did not think the ACS looked official might not be as likely to take the time to open the envelope and respond to the survey.

“The American Community Survey is more noticeable visually; vibrant colors draw my attention. Put U.S. Census Bureau onto the ACS envelope. I’d be more likely to do it if I see that it is associated with the census. Somehow let people know this is related to the census. They are not familiar with the name of this survey—they won’t respond to the name.”

5.7.5 Reactions to the Green Background and Likelihood to Respond

When asked how they felt about the green color on the ACS envelope, respondent opinions were mixed. Seven said they liked it, four did not like it, and three said they were neutral, that the color would make no difference.

We then compared the respondents’ feelings about the green color with their stated likelihood to send in the ACS if they received it in the mail. These results suggest that the respondents’ feeling about the green color may have been associated with their stated likelihood to respond. Five of the six who liked the green said they would be somewhat or very likely to send in the form; the last one would be unlikely to do so. All four who were neutral about the green said they would be likely to complete and submit it. In contrast, just one of the four who did not like the green said that he would be likely to send in the form; the other three said they would be not likely or somewhat unlikely to mail it in. The green color may also have made the mandatory message more noticeable and salient to respondents; the color and/or the mandatory message could have affected their stated likelihood to respond.

Some respondents were not shy about expressing their opinions about the green color. One said that it was “friendlier” than the black-and-white census envelope. Another said, “Governmental things don’t put color on it. I’m not inclined to see color and believe our government is doing it.” A third opined that the ACS gave “more of a feel of consumer surveys that I don’t have to do.” Another said,

“[The ACS] looks, I don’t know, cheap or something, like you might be getting some kind of come-on in the mail from some hucksters...’You may have already won 10 million dollars!’ It’s got that kind of feel to it, you know?” A fifth broke out in song, “Money, money, money, MON-ey!”

Lack of respondent familiarity with the ACS became apparent in our testing. Without any probe by us, seven of nineteen respondents spontaneously said that they did not recognize the ACS. In the words of one, “The ACS does not ring a bell.”

Another said, “It could be someone trying to make money off the survey, not really from the Department of Commerce.” In the same vein, another advised, “Somehow let people know this is related to the census. They are not familiar with the name of this survey; they don’t respond to the name.” That insightful statement and recommendation were key to what we did next.

5.8 Summary and Decision to Stop Testing and Revise

In summary, Phase 1 testing revealed mixed results for the ACS and the envelopes. We assessed whether the changes we had made to the envelope—the addition to the envelopes of the survey name, enclosed in a new text box, with green background color—appeared to be conveying the legitimacy and importance of the ACS materials. A majority of the 13 respondents thought the ACS envelopes were more noticeable than the census envelopes. Additionally, though ten respondents either liked or had no strong negative feelings about the green color, only four thought it was just as official as, or more official looking than, the Census 2010 envelopes. A few made comments suggesting that they associated the green color on the envelope with junk mail. We found that respondents' feelings about the green color seemed linked to their stated likelihood to send in the ACS if they received it at home, though, as noted earlier, that may have been due to the green highlighting making the mandatory message more salient. The inclusion of mandatory messages was shown to increase response rates by about 10 percent (Dillman, Clark, and Treat, 1994).

Four of our 19 respondents said they would open the census envelope, but not the ACS envelope. Three of those same four said they would not be likely to mail it back, as did two others. In addition, we noticed that a large proportion of our cognitive respondents who opened the package with the questionnaire on top did not find and read the cover letter behind the questionnaire with our important messages about the overlap of the census and ACS and that respondents were required by law to complete both. The letter would not be helpful in motivating response if it is not found and read, or at least scanned.

Finally, the discovery that a substantial proportion of our respondents were unfamiliar with the ACS and some expressed hesitation about the legitimacy of the survey caused concern. They did not consider the ACS form as important as the census form, which they remembered from the past. This lack of familiarity with the ACS may affect response rates if respondents do not see the legitimacy and importance of this government survey and discard the form. These results led us to reconsider the overall approach we had adopted that separated the ACS from the census.

5.9 Revisions Made to the Envelopes for Phase 2 Testing and Phase 2 Sample

We were concerned that the materials we had tested were not working as well as we had hoped in motivating our cognitive respondents to say they would complete and submit the ACS materials if they actually received them at home. With the support of the Working Group, we made a number of changes to the envelope while leaving the letters unchanged, as time was growing short to finalize the materials for use in 2010.

We changed the messaging and formatting on the envelope to link the American Community Survey more closely with the Census Bureau to increase the legitimacy and importance of the survey, cognizant that government agencies commonly achieve higher cooperation rates than other survey organizations (Groves and Couper, 1998; Dillman,

2007). We modified the prenotice and questionnaire package envelopes to include the words “U.S. Census Bureau” above the words “THE American Community Survey” in the green box above the window. (See Phase 2 envelopes in Appendix B.6 and B.7, page 49). The key features of the Phase 2 envelopes are

1) A long rectangular green box centered above the window of the envelope, containing the words:

US Census Bureau
THE American Community Survey;

2) A large square green box on the left side of the envelope in the middle enclosing the mandatory message (initial and replacement questionnaire packages); and

3) A less bright, grayer shade of green in the text box.

We followed the same procedures as in our first round of testing, recruiting respondents who were likely to respond to a mail-back survey: persons living with a spouse, those living in a single unit, and/or owning their residences. We recruited such respondents from our existing respondent database, from postings on www.craigslist.org, and from colleagues’ suggestions. We used the same sequence of “mailings.” We used the same sources and personal contracts to recruit new respondents. We conducted ten interviews at our lab and other locations convenient to respondents in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area in the early spring of 2009. Of the ten respondents in Phase 2, six were female and four were male. In terms of age, one was a younger adult in her 20s, four were middle-aged, two were late middle-aged, and three were not classified by age. By race and Hispanic origin, two were White, three were African American, one was Asian, one was Hispanic, and three were not classified.

In this second round of testing, due in part to tight time constraints, we focused primarily on the prenotice and questionnaire package envelopes, but also did systematic observations of whether respondents found and appeared to read the letters. We were especially interested in observing how well the inclusion of “U.S. Census Bureau” above “THE American Community Survey” worked in the green text box on the envelope.

Finally, we were quite interested in watching how respondents took the multiple materials out of the envelopes. During Phase 1, we had noticed that respondents were often not finding, and sometimes not reading, the cover letter with the experimental text due to the number and placement of the other materials in the envelope. To reiterate, the order of inserts starting from just behind the window of the envelope to the back of the envelope is as follows: questionnaire with address label on top; folded cover letter with the top of the letter visible after moving the questionnaire aside; ACS guide; ACS FAQ brochure; and return envelope. When respondents pulled the materials from the front, they see the questionnaire and think they have what they need to complete the task and become focused on the questionnaire. During the cognitive interviews, they were less likely to find and read the letter. In contrast, when respondents pulled the inserts out from the back of the envelope, the first thing they saw was the blank back side of the

return envelope and they had to go through the materials one at a time and found the letter before they saw the questionnaire.

6. FINDINGS: PHASE 2

6.1 ACS Prenotice Envelope

As in Phase 1, the ACS prenotice envelope, now revised (Appendix B6, page 49), was the third mailing presented to respondents after the census prenotice envelope (Appendix A.4, page 43) and the census initial questionnaire package letter (Appendix A.5, page 43). During the observation-only stage, we noted that two respondents read the envelope and another one read/studied it. Two seemed to scan it and five seemed to glance at it. One of these noted the “US Census Bureau” in the green box. Another noted the green and the ACS. Two others mentioned that it was from the Census Bureau. Four of them volunteered that they were getting quite a few letters from the Census Bureau (this is the third one, after the census prenotice letter and questionnaire package). Two wondered, “What do they want this time?” Another said:

“Uh oh, I thought I was done. I must have done something wrong. Why is this green? It says American Community Survey. Is it the same as census or different? This doesn’t have a penalty. It doesn’t look like junk. Has Commerce on it. I don’t know about the American Community Survey.”

Note that in this case, the respondent initially assumed that this new “mailing” was also related to the 2010 Census, but then noticed the color was different and the survey, though sponsored by the same parent agency, had a different name that was unfamiliar to him. He reasoned that these differences on the envelope suggested a different data collection. The other respondents did not seem to be comparing the features of the ACS envelope with the census envelope, as this respondent did.

When we asked respondents if they had looked at the envelope before they opened it, seven said they did, while another said she thought she had. One said he had not and another did not give a definitive answer. Then, when asked if they noticed anything in particular, five said they noticed “THE American Community Survey,” five noticed the color, and three noticed the Census Bureau (some gave multiple answers).³ One noticed the EEO notice at the top center of the envelope and another noticed the Commerce Department at the top right. Of those five who mentioned noticing “THE American Community Survey” on this envelope, one did not yet realize that this was different from the census mailings, saying:

³ Those who identified more than one factor on the envelope included: three respondents who mentioned the Census Bureau, and then the ACS; one of these three also mentioned “equal opportunity.” Another respondent listed the green color, then the ACS, and a different respondent mentioned the green color, U.S. Census Bureau, and the Commerce Department.

“It says Census Bureau, then American Community Survey. I don’t know why they are sending me another. Maybe in the first [the census letter] they are letting me know. I already did the census form.”

Another said, “I had no idea of what it [ACS] meant. I could tell it was part of the same thing [the census].” A third simply recognized this was a survey.

Of the five who mentioned they had noticed the color in particular, opinions were mixed. One said he liked the green color and later said this one looked official, while another said,

“This one gives you a little bit more, because of the green here. You know this is something that is telling you about it, and I would read it. I’m not going to throw it out.”

Another said the color made it a little more user-friendly, but liked the white of the census envelope better. A fourth said that the green box looked like a magazine (like a million dollar sweepstakes).

We asked respondents if they thought about where the mail was coming from before opening it, and all but one respondent said they noticed this came from the government, with some mentioning the Commerce Department and the others the Census Bureau. Some of these seem not to have distinguished the ACS from the Census, and there were mixed responses. For instance, one respondent said, “That’s a positive thing in the mail. Not a bill or advertising. This is an exciting thing once a decade,” while another said, “I probably would think, ‘Oh man! What did I do wrong the first time around? Why am I getting a second mailing?’”

When asked what they expected to find in the envelope, some said a survey or form, others said a letter, and one said she thought it would be something from “Customer service, making sure I filled out the previous form or something like that.”

Nine said they would open this envelope and one said, “Honestly, probably not.” Eight said they would keep this envelope and letter, at least until they had finished the task and a couple said they would keep it longer. “I like to keep copies of everything just in case it comes back to bite you.” One said she would shred it because she has already sent in her census form (she does not yet realize this is different from the census) and the last one said this was just a prenotice to tell him something is coming, so he might not keep it.

After respondents had seen both the census and ACS prenotices, we asked them to think about both. When asked if the letters seemed similar or different, eight respondents said the letters were different, one said similar, and one said both similar and different. One said, “If they were the same, I’d think about why I am getting this. I’d already have done it after the first one.” The one who said they are similar said,

“At the time I assumed it was the same. It says Census Bureau—it’s got to do with the census I filled out. Why are you sending me something else? But the letter explained.”

Another said,

“If both are part of the census, why not treat it as one? It is more work for you guys and for the user. I would think a lot of people wouldn’t answer the second one...See them as Part 1 or Part 2 (census and ACS). That’s enough. Too much time.”

When asked whether or not one looked more official than the other, one person said,

“The white one (census envelope) seems more official. I think the second one seems more towards junk mail, but not at all junk mail. The return address on both of these makes them very official. But I think the color doesn’t make it very official. I would make them both white.”

6.2 ACS Prenotice Letter

As before, we observed respondents as they received the ACS prenotice letter. Five respondents appeared to read this prenotice letter, while two more appeared to scan some and read some. Three glanced at it.

Five of them mentioned that they understood they had to do this questionnaire, and four clearly stated they understood they were required to do both the census and the ACS forms. One offered a useful comment on making the letter more effective, and identified a question she would ask. She said,

“I would be tired of these forms. I think that I would put my ‘response is required by law’ in the first paragraph, because most people only read the first paragraph. I would bold it more and underline it. I think I’d put what the penalty is if you don’t send it in. ‘Cause I’m not that scared. I would wanna know why this wasn’t sent with the other form.”

Another participant wondered if she really were required by law to do it, or if this was just an idle threat. This question, along with the question, “What are they going to do to me if I don’t send it in?” was frequently asked in cognitive testing of ACS and census letters.

6.3 ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Envelope

As respondents continued to receive mailings, we observed how they handled the successive envelopes. The initial ACS questionnaire package envelope (Appendix B.7, page 49) is the fourth envelope the Phase 2 respondents received and it was clear that

respondents began to wonder why they were getting so many envelopes. As a result, some also seemed to be paying less attention to the mailings.

In fact, we observed only one of ten respondents read the envelope. One scanned it, while three glanced at it. Five appeared not to look at the envelope at all before opening it.

Five volunteered comments on the thickness or size of the envelopes, two mentioned the mandatory message, and one noted the return address. A number were annoyed. Here are comments from four respondents:

“Wow, Lord help me! Please! This is a big one. This is getting tedious. Wow, wow, wow (in a sighing, resigned tone of voice). Probably not too many people would do this [as he scans through the questionnaire pages]. The internet would be better.”

[Gasps]. “It’s so THICK! Oh my gosh, this is so gigantic!”

“I seriously would be very peeved at this point. I can’t tell you how upset I would be.”

“I’m not sure if everyone will complete this—it’s too thick! I’m going to put this aside until I have time. There are too many questions to answer. This is definitely very thick. It’s too long. I don’t have the patience.”

Interestingly, in contrast to our observations that just half of them at least looked at the outside of the envelope, all ten respondents told us during the probing session that they had looked at the outside of this envelope before they opened it. By this time they were accustomed to our asking about whether they had looked at the envelope or not and they might not have been able to recall accurately if they had looked at it or not. Some may have been saying yes for social desirability reasons.

When asked if they had noticed anything in particular, several features were mentioned (note that respondents could and did mention more than one feature so each of the features can have up to 10 responses): the mandatory message, green color, and “Census Bureau” were the most commonly mentioned features (Table 8).

Table 8. Features Respondents Reported Noticing on the Initial ACS Questionnaire Package Envelope when Probed

Feature	Number of Respondents
Mandatory message	6
Green color	4
US Census Bureau	4
Thickness	2
Prenotice/package envelope linkage	2
American Community Survey	1

One respondent who said he noticed both the mandatory message and US Census Bureau said,

“This is even more official. The Census Bureau is highlighted by the green background. This tells you right away this is government correspondence. Everything tells you this is from the government.”

This comment is the opposite of the one offered by a Phase 1 respondent who implied the government would never send an envelope with green color when asking respondents to complete an important government survey. This shows that respondents have a wide range of opinions on whether color is effective in government messages, but it should be noted that the green color used in the second phase was grayer and more muted than in the first round.

Another said,

“This one is thick! It’s got a lot of stuff inside. If I have already responded to the census, I might not think about this one, too, because it’s too many envelopes. Too many things to do. I mean, why, if I have already answered here, why do I have to do it again? And then this one [ACS] has more information than that one... If I already received and responded to the census, I don’t know if I will do this, even though it says required by law.”

This respondent is articulating a concern about both the perceived size of the ACS task and a reaction to the message that he was required to complete both the 2010 Census and ACS questionnaires. This relates back to our earlier concern that linking the census and the ACS might lead respondents to balk at having to complete both of them.

A fourth respondent talked about the continuity of color. He said, “All the ACS envelopes have a green box.” It had been our intent that they would notice this.

With other debriefing probes, we found that most respondents realized that the envelope was sent by the Census Bureau or the Commerce Department. Most expected that the envelope would include a survey, and most said they would keep the envelope, at least until they had completed the survey. One said,

“I would probably keep it until I filled it out just so I’d have all the papers. Especially this one even more so than the census one, because you get so much more information [the guide and the FAQ booklet] with this one.”

6.4 ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Letter

We observed carefully while the respondents opened the envelope and handled the five inserts. It appeared that three of the ten respondents in Phase 2 likely read the key text in the letter, while one scanned it quickly and we cannot say whether she read it or

not. The remaining six either glanced at it quickly and were therefore unlikely to have read it, or clearly did not read it. We did not get spontaneous comments on the letter.

As mentioned, in Phase 1 we noted an association between how respondents pulled the materials out of the envelope and whether or not they found and read the letter and repeated this analysis. We noticed the same pattern in Phase 2 (see Table 9).

Table 9. Position of Questionnaire When Items Removed from Initial Mailing Package by Extent of Cover Letter Reading (by Observation): Phase 2

Extent of Cover Letter Reading (observation)	Questionnaire on Top	Questionnaire not on Top	Total
Likely to have read key text			
Read	1	2	3
Scanned, did read key text	-	-	-
May or may not have read			
Scanned, don't know if read	1	-	1
Unlikely to have, or did not, read			
Glanced, unlikely to have read	3	-	3
Did not read	3	-	3
Total	8	2	10

Eight of the ten Phase 2 respondents opened the package and took out the materials with the questionnaire on top. Only one of these eight clearly read the letter, which she found only after looking through all the other pieces in the package. The other six who opened the envelope with the questionnaire side up did not read the key experimental text in the second paragraph. Two of these glanced at it briefly, one hardly looked at it, and three did not see the letter from this package at all.

At most, just two of the eight respondents who opened the package with the questionnaire on top found and read the letter. That is similar to the proportion of two Phase 1 respondents shown earlier in Table 5 who opened the package with the questionnaire on top.

In contrast, two of the ten Phase 2 respondents opened the envelope from the back and pulled out the inserts with the back of the return envelope on top; both of these respondents found the letter and read the key text. That outcome is similar to the results from Phase 1 earlier when the majority (four of six) respondents who opened the package with the back of the return envelope on top found and read the cover letter.

These results in Phase 2 are consistent with and confirm our findings from Phase 1 in terms of the association between what item is on top when the respondent takes the materials from the envelope and whether the respondent sees and reads the letter and the key text. Results in Phase 3 were also consistent (see Schwede and Sorokin 2010 and 2009a). It is not known if propensity to find and read the letter during cognitive testing would be associated with propensity to respond in a live survey.

While we were not particularly concerned with the reminder postcards, the replacement questionnaire package for Census 2010, or the replacement package for the ACS, we observed respondents' treatment of them and noted their comments. Generally, respondents recognized that these mailings were reminders or replacements for two different surveys. One respondent noted that the census card says, "Required by law" while the ACS does not. Another noted that the cards do not tell you what to do if you have not received any mailings yet.

6.5 ACS Replacement Questionnaire Package Envelope

Eight respondents either scanned or glanced at the envelope, one studied it, and one did not look at it at all. One respondent noted the green box with the Census Bureau and ACS in it, while nine others did not offer any spontaneous comments on any of the envelope's physical features. As with the census replacement package, respondents were annoyed and frustrated at receiving another package. Three respondents did not open the envelope at all. Some respondents expressed concerns about wastefulness and non-necessity of repeat mailings.

6.6 ACS Replacement Package Letter

Of the seven respondents who opened this replacement package, five did not see the cover letter at all. Only two respondents both found and read the replacement package cover letter.

One specifically noted that she liked that the cover letter is on the top in the census envelope, in comparison to the ACS cover letter, which is found in the middle of the package. She suggested we move the ACS letter to the top of the stack so it is seen when the envelope is open. We thought that was a very good suggestion. Nine respondents realized that the questionnaire is the same; one did not.

6.7 Comparisons of Census and ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Envelopes

As in Phase 1, we asked respondents to compare the ACS and 2010 Census initial questionnaire mailing package envelopes by themselves, without any inserts. We asked about the likelihood to open the envelopes and then to send in the questionnaire.

6.7.1 Likelihood to Open the Envelopes

When shown the 2010 Census and ACS envelopes and asked about their likelihood to open one or the other, both, or neither if both arrived at their house, nine of the ten respondents said they would open both. The remaining respondent said he would open the one that "had the actual census form in it" because "I know I have to do that one..." "It's just branded a little better on the envelope. I know who it's from, what it's for."

6.7.2 Likelihood to Complete and Submit the Questionnaires

Most said that one envelope or the other would not affect their likelihood to complete the questionnaire inside it. One mentioned that a factor would be the thickness of the form, while the other mentioned it would depend on the closeness in time that the two questionnaires would come in the mail.

One respondent said he would probably do both, but if he did only one, it would be the one with the actual census form in it that he knew he needed to do. He is the one who was previously quoted as saying, “It’s just branded a little better on the envelope: I know who it’s from and what it is for.”

In terms of likelihood to complete and mail in the ACS form, nine said they would be likely to complete and mail it in (seven said “very likely” and two said “somewhat likely”) while one said he would be somewhat unlikely. Most mentioned some variation of civic duty as the reason to complete it. One of those who said he was very likely to complete the ACS form said the following:

“I think I would feel connected with the census, and I know that they are done infrequently, but they are done in a timely fashion...This is more community-based services, and I’ve lived in the same community now for 20 years, so I would want to see that happen.”

Another said, “It has the green things. It’s very important. I know I have to respond to this.” The green color in one box highlights the mandatory response message while in the second box, it highlights the connection of the ACS to the Census Bureau. It is not clear if he sees the color as the factor signifying importance or the text messages highlighted by the color.

For the two who said they would be somewhat likely to complete and submit the form, respondent burden seemed to be a concern. They indicated that the ACS was too long and it would be too time-consuming to fill out. One suggested that the survey data may not be meaningful if people rush through it, filling in answers without bothering to check their records carefully to make sure they give accurate data. The other felt that because the surveys ask for some of the same data in both data collections, people should just be asked to complete it once, instead of on two different forms. One of these also indicated he might not respond if he had “issues” with what it was asking.

The length of the ACS questionnaire was also mentioned by the man who said he would be somewhat unlikely to complete the form, along with two other reasons:

“It’s long and it asks very personal questions that I don’t think are any of the government’s business. And I’ve never heard of that survey.”

When we followed up and asked if respondents would be likely to complete and return both, one of those who had said he was very likely to do each of them separately now

said he would be somewhat likely to do both. We do not have any more information on why he changed his answer here.

We then asked what types of things respondents would consider when deciding to do one, both, or neither of these questionnaires. Four of the respondents mentioned concerns about the nature of the questions. One said he might be skeptical of answering certain questions. Another said,

“There might be a couple of things I’m uncomfortable with and I might leave them blank...The other concern is...about the survey getting into the wrong hands. Especially when you have these return envelopes addressed to the Director. That seems kind of funny to me.”

The third asked, “It seems like an awful lot of information they are asking from people, like mortgage and all this other stuff: what do they need that for?” The fourth mentioned “the nature of the questions, how long the form is, and what the penalty is if I don’t do it.”

6.7.3 Perceived Similarities and Differences of the Envelopes

Later, when the cognitive part of the interview with the eight mailings was completed, we asked more questions in the debriefing about the census and ACS initial questionnaire packages. Seven of our ten respondents reported that the census questionnaire package envelope (Appendix A.5, page 43) and Phase 2 ACS initial questionnaire package envelope (Appendix B.7, page 49) seemed different to them, while two said they were similar, and one said they were both similar and different.

Six mentioned that the two were for different data collections. Several made other comments. One said,

“They seem similar. The [ACS] seems more friendly and the [census] one seems like tax-related, official, important documents. The [ACS] has a more friendly appeal to it, like it could be junk mail, except for the fact that it says, ‘Your response is required by law.’ It’s not as official looking to me.”

Another said,

“THE American Community Survey “looks very generic”...It looks like the government would produce it. There’s no trademarking like on the other one, the 2010 Census they are trying to associate as part of their ad campaign. This one has nothing that really identifies what it is or who it’s for other than the words themselves; there’s no image.”

Two mentioned features of the typeface. One respondent focused on the font itself in the ACS green box and mentioned she has been reading books about fonts and formatting over the last few months.

“The font [in the ACS green box] makes me glaze over—san serif is just good for headlines. Text in books is always in a serif font, which glides the eyes from one word to another and makes reading easier.”

She pointed to the serif font used in the Census 2010 logo and said that is was very nice font. She later went on to say that the ACS materials were using fonts in the wrong way. She felt that because the text in the ACS guide is sans serif, it very difficult to read.

Another respondent said she found the census envelope’s black-on-white typeface and the font size aesthetically pleasing, but did not like the green of the ACS envelope.

After they had stated opinions of their own on if and how the forms were different, we explicitly mentioned to the respondents that one envelope was black and white while the other also had two boxes with a green background. As in Phase 1, we then asked questions concerning noticeability, official appearance, and the green color.

6.7.4 Noticeability

We probed on whether one of the two envelopes would be more noticeable in a stack of incoming mail or if there would be no difference. Four said the ACS was more noticeable while two indicated the census envelope was more noticeable. Four thought there was no difference in noticeability. Of those who mentioned there was no difference between the two, the following comments were made. One said, “It’s the boldness...bold catches your eye, and color does too. And like I said, your response is required by law would too.” Another mentioned,

“Both are noticeable. The ACS looks more like junk mail. There’s something green-governmenty about this envelope. On the census envelope, the logo is bold. Size matters.”

A third noted that the big font stands out on the census form. He suggested the ACS would be helped by using a bigger font size in the name. A fourth respondent linked the color with higher noticeability but a less official appearance:

“The white one [census] is more official-looking to me; the other one is not as official-looking, but certainly the color...color is always more noticeable when you are going through mail. Actually, your mind kind of works that way as well. You can remember it has a green color on it. It lends itself to be less important with this coloration, to me.”

Finally, another said,

“I don’t think there would be much difference, because both of them are from the Census Bureau. I think the one with the bold letters [census] is quite noticeable. The other one is, too, but...I would pay more attention to the [census] one than the [ACS] one, but both are noticeable...The other one

[ACS] has the green, but of course you look at the ‘American Community Survey’ and try to figure out what is this.”

One of the three respondents who indicated the ACS envelope was most noticeable said,

“The ACS because of the green. It’s catchy. And the US Census Bureau [in the green box above American Community Survey in the center of the envelope]. I’d look carefully. I don’t want to waste time on junk mail.” (He thought the ACS was *more* official.)

The big, bold logo on the census envelope was mentioned by a number of the respondents. One of the two who picked the census envelope as more noticeable said,

“The Census envelope is way more noticeable. The logo is big, catchy, and fun-looking. The ACS looks dry to me—straight lines. The color may make it look like other mail.”

6.7.5 Official Appearance

As seen above, some respondents had already commented on the official appearance of the forms, but we made sure all had the chance to answer this. We asked, “Do you think one of these envelopes looks more official than the other or is there no difference in how official they look?” Seven of the ten respondents said the census envelope was more official. Here are their comments:

“It’s like the Franklin mint. Key word is census. ACS is lost in all the other words: EEO, ACS 26 version 10...”

“The census form is plain generic, with white background and black print. The ACS is more commercial/maybe nonprofit – like an advertisement of some sort to maybe reduce your mortgage. Maybe it’s the green. I do like the green but it reminds me more of an advertisement or the things that you receive and they pretend it’s from the federal government but it’s really not.”

“The census is very official, with Census 2010 in bold, boldness in the heading part. Census, not a survey. The ACS is a survey, maybe green, heading lacking boldness, plain.”

“The census has a modern serif font. The ACS is trying to be official, but not slick enough. Does have required by law. It needs to be bolder. Use the census font. Make the center box the same as the required-by-law box, same depth of green, same denseness of lines around it. Why is “THE” capitalized and the survey name isn’t? Make them consistent, by putting ACS in all caps.”

“The census looks more official.”

Three respondents thought the ACS looked more official. As noted earlier, one of them offered comments:

“I saw US Census Bureau and required by law. This is even more official. The Census Bureau is highlighted by a green background. This tells you right away this is government correspondence. Everything tells you this is from the government.”

6.7.6 Reaction to the Green Color and Likelihood to Respond

In order to understand what impact the green color in particular might have on respondents, we asked them, “How do you feel about the green background on the ACS envelope?” Six respondents liked the green color. As noted, one said he associated green with government and he seemed positive about that. Three said they thought the green made no difference in the envelopes while only one did not like it. Hence nine persons either liked the green or said they were neutral about it. The respondent who did not like it said she could not quite put her finger on what it is specifically that turned her off about the green on the envelope as a whole.

In terms of likelihood of response, of the nine who said they either liked the green or were neutral about it, eight said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to send in the form while one said he was somewhat unlikely to send in the form. The one person who did not like the green said he would be very likely to respond. Since there was only one who did not like the green color, we do not have any variation as we did in Phase 1. It should be recalled that the green on the Phase 2 envelopes was grayer and more subdued than the green in Phase 1, but we do not have any information here to say that the green was a factor here.

When asked if another color would be more effective than green, a few suggested blue, and three suggested red and blue together for our national colors, with one of these saying to put a flag on the envelope. That approach was tried in 1986 and did not work as well as the official approach with just black and white and no illustration (DeMaio, 1988).

6.7.7 Effectiveness of Color

We also asked our respondents if they thought it was more effective to have just black and white on this government survey envelope, to include a third color, or if it made no difference. Four respondents said it would be more effective to have a third color (one mentioning the green), while three said that black and white would be more effective, and the remaining three said it would make no difference. Those who thought the black and white would be more effective said that some other feature, like the trademark logo, or font/format changes, or boldness would help.

One other respondent said something should distinguish the ACS from the census, either the typeface or the color (but this person did not like the green). She suggested bolder and/or larger letters, like on the Census logo.

6.7.8 “U.S. Census Bureau” in the Envelope Text Box

We asked respondents two questions about the words, “U.S. Census Bureau,” in the envelope text box. In answer to the question, “What does “U.S. Census Bureau” over “ACS” [in the text box] mean to you?” one respondent said that it meant “nothing.” Three respondents mentioned a survey, or a survey regarding the community, but with no explicit mention of the Census Bureau. Six other respondents did explicitly mention the Census Bureau in their answers.

Because we had added “U.S. Census Bureau” to the text box in Phase 2 to link the survey to a government agency and increase its legitimacy, we asked “What if the green box did not have 'US Census Bureau' in it?” Five of the ten respondents said that they would be less likely to open the envelope if “U.S. Census Bureau” were not printed in the green box above the survey name. They were unfamiliar with the American Community Survey, and said they might have thought it was junk mail or some kind of promotional mailing.

The other five respondents said that the absence of “U.S. Census Bureau” would have no effect on their likelihood to open the envelope. Two mentioned that they would look to the top left corner and notice the Department of Commerce, thereby realizing that it was important.

6.8 Summary of Findings from Phase 2

The change made in Phase 2 to link the American Community Survey more closely with the Census Bureau by adding “U.S. Census Bureau” to the text box appeared to meet the cognitive testing goal of trying to improve the respondents’ stated likelihood of ACS response if they received both the census and the ACS forms in the mail at some later time. In Phase 1, four of 19 said they would be somewhat unlikely/not likely to open the ACS questionnaire package envelope and then five said they were somewhat unlikely/not likely to complete and submit the questionnaire. In contrast, in Phase 2, the more explicit linkage of the ACS to the “U.S. Census Bureau” in the green box appeared to increase the legitimacy of the ACS. Just one of the ten respondents was somewhat unlikely to open the envelope and just one of the ten said he would be somewhat unlikely to complete and mail the questionnaire if s/he received it at home.

Given the small sample sizes and the hypothetical question on future likelihood of response, it is possible that these differences are due to chance or some other factors. However, when we asked Phase 2 respondents what would happen if “U.S. Census Bureau” had not been included in the text box over the survey name, half said they would be less likely to respond. That suggests that the inclusion of the bureau name above the survey name was an important feature for respondents in establishing the legitimacy of the ACS as a government survey. Additionally, we think the more subdued green on the Phase 2 envelopes may have helped as well.

One notable finding from this study was that while respondents were finding and reading our critical messages in the ACS prenotice letter, few were finding and reading the cover letter in the questionnaire packages with the critical census-ACS information we are trying to convey and that this appears to be linked to how the envelope is opened. Both letters have similar key messages so perhaps those messages are received in the prenotice, even if they are not read in the initial questionnaire package itself.

It appears from our observations of respondents opening ACS initial questionnaire packages in both Phases 1 and 2 that there was a consistent relationship between how the respondent opens the envelope with the five inserts (from the front with the questionnaire on the top or from the back with the back of the return envelope on top) and whether or not respondents find and read the cover letter. Large majorities of respondents in Phases 1 and 2 and in Phase 3 (Schwede and Sorokin 2010 and 2011) removed the materials from the questionnaire packages with the questionnaire face up. The questionnaire was the largest item in the package and the one they needed to complete. Respondents started looking through the questionnaire to see what they will need to fill out, then many looked at the brochure and glanced at or looked through the guide, and only then might have gotten to the letter; some appeared not to see it at all. Many did not even look at the letter in the initial package, and only a few scanned or read it.

While respondents do seem to be reading this information in the prenotice packages that just contain the letter, it is not clear whether this knowledge would be remembered when the questionnaire package arrived at the same household some days later. It is not clear how many respondents would not read the prenotice letter, and then would miss this special information in the questionnaire package as well.

We note that our cognitive testing situation itself with the eight successive mailings for respondents to process could have produced a high rate of fatigue and tediousness that resulted in a higher rate of respondents not paying full attention to the ACS questionnaire packages and letters. By the time they got the initial ACS questionnaire package, respondents had already received the census prenotice and questionnaire package and the ACS prenotice letter. Some were already stating they were restless and annoyed.

We cannot predict whether the association between what comes out on top when respondents open the envelopes and whether or not they find and read the cover letter with the key information would be replicated later in 2010 when some persons would actually receive interspersed live ACS and census materials in their homes to complete. There is a chance this was an artifact of the cognitive testing situation, but the consistent results across three phases of interviews tend to argue against that.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COGNITIVE TESTING

Several recommendations for changes to the envelope and letters emerged from the testing. We recommended keeping the two lines, “U.S. Census Bureau” and “THE American Community Survey” together on the ACS envelope. This addition of “U.S.

Census Bureau” to the green text box appeared to have been successful in increasing the number of respondents who may open and complete this form when they have no prior familiarity with the ACS.

We weighed the mixed results on the green color in the text boxes on the envelope and suggested going forward with it, with some modifications: making the green a more subdued greyish-green color while enlarging the fonts and the text box. As noted earlier, a number of respondents thought the green was more noticeable than the census form, but less official. Others said the green made the ACS look more official, friendlier, or not like a government form and it made them think of junk mail.

As to the use of a third color on questionnaire envelopes in general, the majority thought having a third color on a form in general was either less effective than black and white or made no difference. Some suggested enhancing the appearance of the letters with the census-type font (which most respondents commented on favorably), with bolding, with larger letters, and/or with an ACS logo.

Additionally, we suggested moving the EEO statement from the top center prime real estate on the prenotice envelope to a nondescript place, perhaps at the bottom left after the continuous US Census Bureau logo there. We also suggested making the experimental ACS form number less prominent on the left side of the envelopes.

We also suggested moving critical sentences in the letters up into the first or second paragraph, if possible. Several respondents told us that few people read a whole letter or even a whole paragraph. They urged us to move critical sentences right up to the first sentence, use bolding and underlining for emphasis, and use bullets whenever possible to highlight a list. These recommendations were from a few respondents – it is not clear if this would be effective for most respondents in an actual ACS mailout. We suggested perhaps converting the key messages in the second paragraph to bullet form with the aim of better capturing respondents’ attention if they just glance at the letter, rather than read it. The initial questionnaire package letter had just a reference to the prenotice letter sent earlier, without a clear statement of what we want the respondents to do. We suggested reworking the reference back to the prenotice letter as a clause at the end of the next sentence.

If the critical content in the questionnaire package letters is not read by respondents, it is not effective. We suggested moving the ACS initial package and replacement package letters to the back of the five inserts so that they would be on top when the back flap was opened.

8. SUMMARY OF FINAL REVISIONS FOR ACS USE IN 2010

Research was conducted by staff in our Jeffersonville, Indiana Processing Office on whether the ACS inserts could be reordered within the envelope to make the cover letter more visible by moving it to the back of the questionnaire package envelope. They found

that the letters jammed when inserted at the back of the envelope and that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to change how the envelopes were stuffed. As a result, no plans were made to change the placement of the letters in the ACS initial and replacement package envelopes. It was too late to make any other changes. No changes to the wording in the ACS prenotice, initial package, and replacement package letters were made.

The recommendations to move the EEO statement and ACS form number to a less noticeable location to the left of the address windows were adopted. The text box was enlarged and the lines around the box were changed to be the same width as those around the mandatory message. The fonts within the main box were enlarged. The words “U.S. Census Bureau” above “THE American Community Survey” were retained. The green color within the text box was lighter, more subdued, and more uniform without the dots (see Appendix B.8, page 50).

Consultations were held with the working group and high-level managers on the mixed results on the green color from this testing. Concerns were voiced about moving forward with a three-color envelope that would go into full ACS production during the critical 2010 Census year without having first tested it in a split-panel test. The group decided in July, 2009 that a new hybrid envelope using the new text box we recommended but without the green color should be developed. It was also decided that a split-panel test should be done to test experimental panels with the no-color text and green text messages on envelopes (see Appendix B.8 and B.9, page 50) and the standard control ACS envelopes, as well as the experimental letters and control letters.

The later split-panel test was conducted within the actual 2010 ACS production survey from January through November, 2010 (Chesnut and Davis, 2011). Their findings showed that the experimental envelopes with “U.S. Census Bureau” and “THE American Community Survey” enclosed within a text box above the window in the ACS questionnaire package letters achieved significantly higher mail response rates than the standard ACS envelopes in 2010. The new no-color hybrid version had a greater increase in the response rate than the green version did, but both had significantly higher response rates than the standard envelope. The experimental letters increased participation significantly, which seem to indicate that in the actual mailout, respondents did find and read the experimental cover letter. That was a relief, given that our cognitive testing had suggested that some respondents who opened the envelope from the front might not be finding and reading the letter with the experimental messages.

Chesnut and Davis (2011) reported that the best combination in 2010 was the new hybrid no-color experimental envelopes paired with the experimental letters, which significantly raised response rates in 2010 before, during, and after the peak of census operations, which were from March to May of 2010. During the census and post-census periods of the split-panel test in 2010, the majority of the ACS production sample had been allocated to the new letter and no-color version, so the mail response rate gains applied to the majority of the ACS sample. It appeared that the ACS in 2010 working group’s goal of mitigating the decline in ACS response rates during the 2010 Census was achieved.

9. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A: 2010 Census Letters and Envelopes

A.1: 2010 Census Prenotice Letter



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

March 8, 2010

TO RESIDENT AT
APT 8
2008 CENSUS WAY
SUITLAND, MD 12345-1234

Dear Resident:

About one week from now, you will receive a 2010 Census form in the mail.
When you receive your form, please fill it out and mail it in promptly.

Your response is important. Results from the 2010 Census will be used to help each community get its fair share of government funds for highways, schools, health facilities, and many other programs you and your neighbors need. Without a complete, accurate census, your community may not receive its fair share.

If you are interested in working on the 2010 Census, please call our toll-free jobs line at 1-866-861-2010, or visit our Web site at <www.census.gov/2010census> and click on "Jobs".

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director, U.S. Census Bureau

DY-5(L)(X1) (8-2008)

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

United States™
Census
2010

A.2 : 2010 Census Initial Questionnaire Package Letter



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

March 15, 2010

Dear Resident:

This is your official 2010 Census form. We need your help to count everyone in the United States by providing basic information about all the people living in this house or apartment. **Please complete and mail back the enclosed census form today.**

Your answers are important. Census results are used to decide the number of representatives each state has in the U.S. Congress. The amount of government money your neighborhood receives also depends on these answers. That money is used for services for children and the elderly, roads, and many other local needs.

Your answers are confidential. This means the Census Bureau cannot give out information that identifies you or your household. Your answers will only be used for statistical purposes, and for no other purpose. The back of this letter contains more information about protecting your data.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director, U.S. Census Bureau

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

United States
Census
2010

A.3 : 2010 Census Replacement Questionnaire Package Letter



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

April 6, 2010

Dear Resident:

A few weeks ago, the U.S. Census Bureau sent your household an official 2010 Census form. U.S. law requires you to respond. If you have not yet responded, we encourage you to do so immediately.

Return your form today. This is your last chance to respond by mail before a Census Bureau Representative contacts you.

It is important that each household respond only once. If you have already provided your census information, we thank you—there is no need to provide it again.

Your answers are confidential. This means the Census Bureau cannot give out information that identifies you or your household. Your answers will only be used for statistical purposes, and for no other purpose. The back of this letter contains more information about protecting your data.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director, U.S. Census Bureau

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

United States
Census
2010

A.4 : 2010 Census Prenotice Envelope

**U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau**
1201 E 10th Street
Jeffersonville IN 47144

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for Private Use \$300

DY-5 (9-2008)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

United States™
**Census
2010**

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE
& FEES PAID
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
PERMIT NO. G-58



U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

9-9-2008- Size 9-1/2 x 4-1/8 with covered window 1-1/2 x 5

A.5: 2010 Census Questionnaire Package Envelope

Draft 1 8/2/2008
Size 10-1/16 x 6-1/16" Open window 4 x 2-3/4"

**U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau**
1201 E 10th Street
Jeffersonville IN 47144

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for Private Use \$300

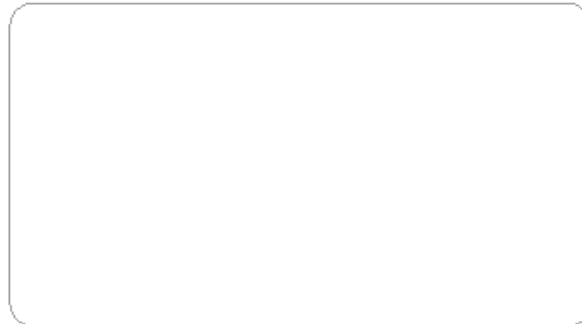
DY-6A(X1) (8-2008)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

United States™
**Census
2010**

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE
& FEES PAID
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
PERMIT NO. G-58

U.S. Census Form Enclosed
**YOUR RESPONSE
IS REQUIRED BY LAW**



U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

8-2-2008

APPENDIX B: American Community Survey Letters and Envelopes

B.1: ACS Prenotice Letter



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

ACS 999 029 043 04 111 0901 07
SEQ001-00020



TO THE RESIDENT OF:
APT 8
2008 CENSUS WAY
SUITLAND MD 12345-1234

Dear Resident:

In a few days your household will receive a questionnaire in the mail for a very important national survey—the American Community Survey. When your questionnaire arrives, please fill it out and mail it back promptly. The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting this survey and chose your address, not you personally, as part of a randomly selected sample.

The American Community Survey is a separate part of the 2010 Census program. Some households, including yours, will receive both the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census this year. Your response to **both** is required by U.S. law.

In their own way, the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census provide an important picture of America. They show not only the number of people who live here, but *how* we live as a Nation—our education, housing, jobs, and more. The information you provide helps community leaders decide where schools, highways, hospitals, and other services are needed.

If you have access to the Internet and want to learn more about the American Community Survey, please visit the Census Bureau's Web site:
<<http://www.census.gov/acs>>.

Thank you in advance for your help and for responding to both the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director

ACS-12(LX2010) (9-2008)

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

Helping You Make Informed Decisions



www.census.gov

B.2 : ACS Initial Questionnaire Package Letter



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

Dear Resident:

I recently sent a letter to your household about the American Community Survey. Enclosed is a questionnaire and information about the survey. Please complete the questionnaire and mail it back as soon as possible in the postage-paid envelope. The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting this survey and chose your address, not you personally, as part of a randomly selected sample.

Some households, including yours, will receive both the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census this year. **Your response to both is required by U.S. law.** The Census Bureau is required by U.S. law to keep your answers confidential.

The American Community Survey collects critical up-to-date information that is 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 enclosed brochure answers frequently asked questions about the American Community Survey. If you need help filling out the questionnaire, please use the enclosed guide or call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director

Enclosures

ACS-13(LX)2010I (9-2008)

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U
Helping You Make Informed Decisions

www.census.gov

B.3: ACS Replacement Questionnaire Package Letter



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

Dear Resident:

About three weeks ago, the U.S. Census Bureau sent the American Community Survey questionnaire to your address. If you have already completed and mailed your questionnaire, thank you very much. If you have not mailed the questionnaire, please send it soon. We have enclosed another questionnaire with this letter.

We realize that you may have recently answered the 2010 Census. Some households, including yours, will receive both the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey this year. **Answering both is important and is required by U.S. law.** Your response is so important that a Census Bureau field representative may attempt to contact you by telephone or personal visit if we do not receive your questionnaire. The Census Bureau is required by U.S. law to keep your answers confidential.

The information collected in the American Community Survey will help decide where new schools, hospitals, and fire stations are needed. The information also is used to develop programs to reduce traffic congestion, provide job training, and plan for the healthcare needs of the elderly.

The enclosed brochure answers frequently asked questions about the American Community Survey. If you need help filling out the questionnaire, please use the enclosed guide or call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Steve H. Murdock
Director

Enclosures

ACS-14(LX2010) (9-2008)

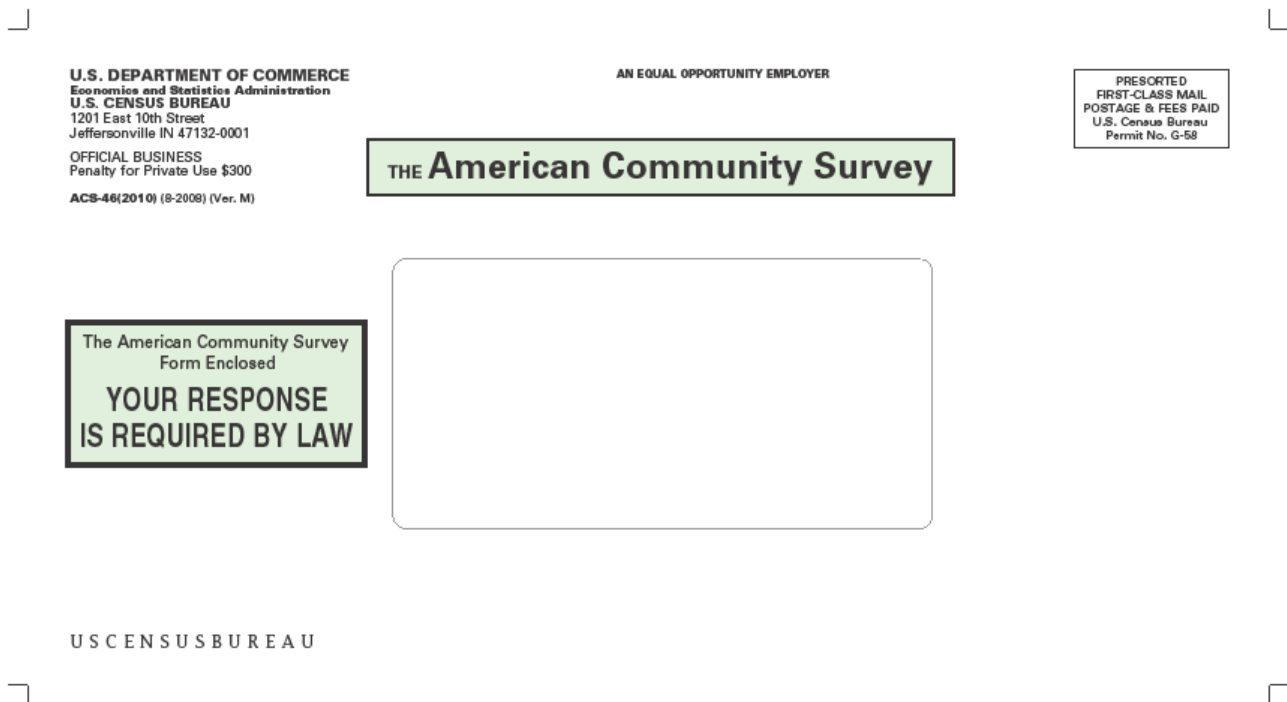
U S C E N S U S B U R E A U
Helping You Make Informed Decisions

www.census.gov

B.4: ACS Prenotice Envelope in Phase 1 - Green box, no clear link to Census



B.5: ACS Questionnaire Envelope in Phase 1 - Green box, no clear link to Census



B.6: ACS Prenotice Envelope in Phase 2 - Add “U.S. Census Bureau” to Green Box to Link the ACS to the Census Bureau

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
1201 East 10th Street
Jeffersonville IN 47132-0001

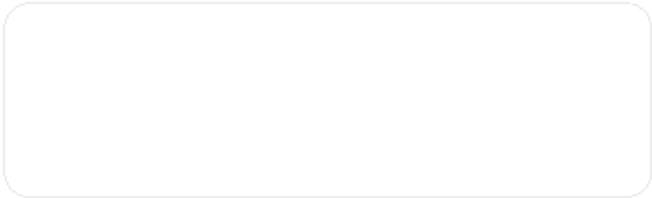
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for Private Use \$300

ACS-49(2010)(Ver. Q) (8-2008)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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FIRST-CLASS MAIL
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U.S. Census Bureau
Permit No. G-58

**U.S. Census Bureau
THE American Community Survey**



U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

B.7: ACS Questionnaire Package Envelope in Phase 2: Add “U.S. Census Bureau” to Green Box to Link the ACS to the Census Bureau

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-46(2010)(Ver. U)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
U.S. Census Bureau
Permit No. G-58

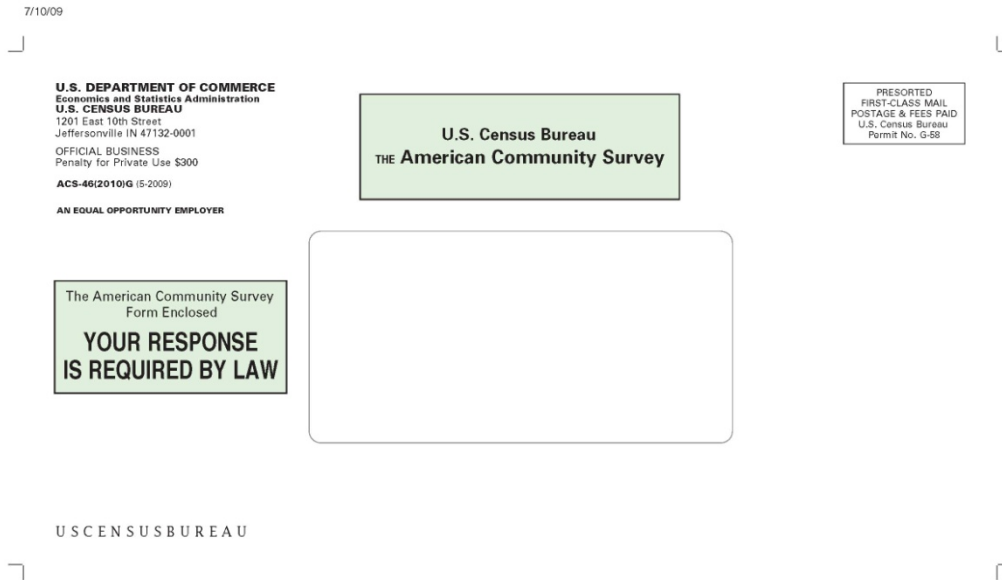
**U.S. Census Bureau
THE American Community Survey**

The American Community Survey
Form Enclosed
**YOUR RESPONSE
IS REQUIRED BY LAW**

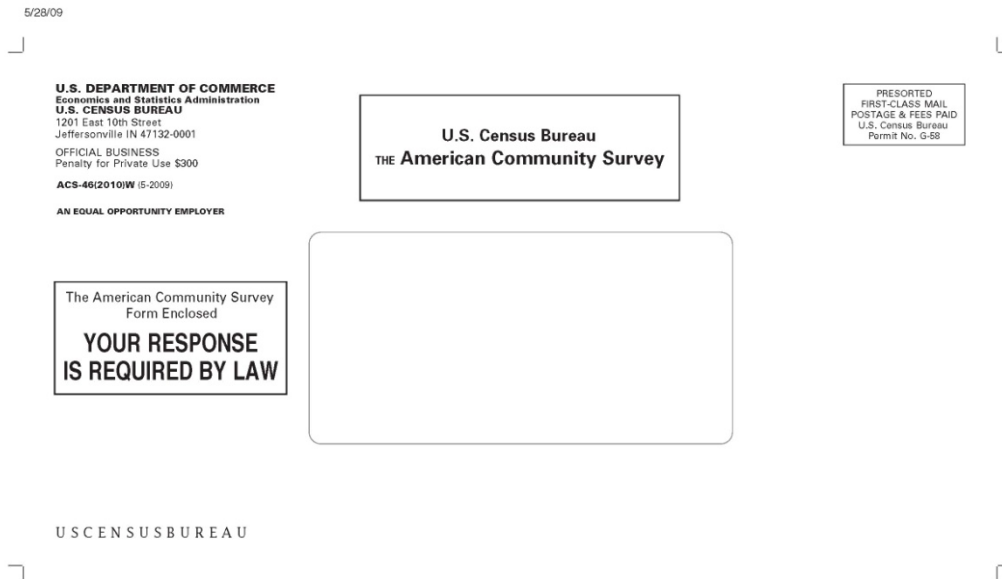


U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

B.8: Final ACS Questionnaire Package Envelope with Color for 2010 Test



B.9: Final ACS Questionnaire Package Envelope without Color for 2010 Test



APPENDIX C: ACS Messaging Project, Phase 1 Cognitive Testing Interview Protocol (10/24/08)

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____, and I work for the Census Bureau. Thanks for agreeing to help us. Let me start by telling you a little bit about what we will be doing today. Every year, the Census Bureau conducts a number of surveys by mail, and today we're going to look at some of the items that might be mailed to you in 2010. Chances are that you'll be expecting to get something from the Census Bureau because we'll be doing a lot of advertising for the 2010 Census then. So, as I give you these mailings, I'm going to ask you to treat each one as you would if it came to your house. Please go through these as you would at home, as if I were not there, but say out loud what you are thinking. When you've finished with one, I'll give you the next. When you're finished with all of them, I'm going to ask you some questions about the mailings and your reactions to them. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in how these mailings work for you.

Permission to Tape Record

Because it would be hard to keep track of everything you say today, I'd like to tape-record this session [Hand respondent consent form.] Please read this over and sign it. I want you to know that your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be seen by Census employees involved with this project. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can decline to answer any particular question.

Think-out-loud Instructions

As I said before, we are interested in how these mailings work for you. So, while you are looking at the materials I give you, I'd like you to tell me what's going through your mind. Instead of thinking to yourself, I'd like you to think out loud. I would like you to tell me everything you're thinking as you go through the mailings: questions that come to your mind, reactions you're having, and what information you're getting from what you're looking at. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in how the mailings work for you.

TURN ON TAPE RECORDER

STANDARD PROBE:

1. What are you thinking?

PART 1: PRESENTATION OF MAILINGS AND OBSERVATION

I. Census Pre-notice

SET-UP: Around March 7th, [show date on calendar] you would receive this letter in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do. [Hand respondent mailing.]

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance
 - scan
 - read
 - study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - logo
 - other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R seem to look at/read the letter text?

How much of it?

 - a. didn't look
 - b. glance
 - c. scan
 - d. read
 - e. study

4. Does R say anything about the text? What?

5. Does R put letter back into envelope?

6. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.
Anything else?

STANDARD PROBE, if needed

II. Census Initial Questionnaire Package

SET-UP: Around March 16th, [show date on calendar] **you would receive this in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.** [Hand respondent mailing]

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R asks about whether or not to complete form, ask them just to take a look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- logo
- mandatory
- thickness
- other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R look at/read the letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

5. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- color
- bold print

- logo
- other

6. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

7. Does R compare this letter to the pre-notice letter?

8. Does R ask if he/she should fill out questionnaire?

9. Does R look through the questionnaire?

Ignore it?

10. If R completes looks through, does R show any reaction (annoyance, impatience, acceptance...)? How so?

11. If R completes the census questionnaire, does he/she put it into the census return envelope?

12. If R put any materials back into out-going envelope?

12. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task

Anything else?

STANDARD PROBE, if needed

III. ACS Pre-notice envelope and letter

SET-UP: Around March 18th, [show date on calendar] you would receive this letter in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do. [Hand respondent mailing.]

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance

- scan
- read
- study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- color
- ACS name
- census logo at bottom
- other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope?

5. To what extent does R look at/read text of letter?

How much of it?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

6. In particular, does R seem to look at/read second paragraph?

7. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- bold print
- other

8. Does R say anything about the text, including:

- "ACS is separate from Census"
- "required by U.S. law"
- "some households, including yours, will receive both"
- "must do both"

9. Does R compare this ACS pre-notice letter with any census letter?

10. Does R place the ACS pre-notice letter back in its envelope?

11. .List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

12. Does R place envelope and letter with Census materials, or separate

them?

Anything else?

STANDARD PROBE, if needed

IV. ACS Initial Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: On March 22nd, [show date on calendar] **you would receive this packet in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.** [Hand respondent mailing.]

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R asks about whether or not to complete form, ask them just to take a look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance
 - scan
 - read
 - study
2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - Color
 - ACS name
 - mandatory
 - thickness
 - other
3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?
4. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope?
5. How does R take materials out of the envelope? Does R look at the letter before going to the questionnaire?
6. To what extent does R look at/read the cover letter?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look

- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

7. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- bold print
- other

8. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

- “ACS is separate from Census”
- “required by U.S. law”
- “some households, including yours, will receive both”
- “must do both”
- other

9. Does R seem to compare this ACS cover letter or mailing package with any other census or ACS letter or package?

10. Does R ask if he/she should fill out questionnaire?

11. Does R look through the questionnaire?

Ignore it?

Compare it to Census questionnaire?

12. If R looks through questionnaire, does R show any reaction (annoyance, impatience, acceptance....) How so?

13. Does R put any materials back into the out-going ACS envelope?

14. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

15. Does R place materials in same place as Census mailings, or with ACS pre-notice?

16. Does anything happen with the FAQs or ACS brochures?

Anything else?

PART TWO: NEUTRAL PROBING

I. Census Pre-notice Letter

SET-UP: Now I have a few questions I'd like to ask you about some of the mailings. First, I'd like you to look at this letter again. [Give participant letter.]

PROBE:

1. This is the first letter you received. When I first gave you the envelope with this letter, how much of the letter did you read? Where did you stop?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular about it? If so, what?
3. What would you have done next with it? Why?

II. ACS Pre-notice Letter

SET-UP: Please look at this letter again. [Give participant letter.]

PROBE:

1. This is the third letter you received. When I first gave you the envelope with this letter, how much of the letter did you read? Where did you stop?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular about it? If so, what?
3. What would you have done with it next? Why?
4. What do you think the main point of the letter is?

III. Comparison

SET-UP: For this next question, I'd like you to think about both of these letters.

PROBE:

1. At the time you first saw the letters, did these two letters seem the same or different? If so, how?

IV. Census Pre-notice Envelope

SET-UP: Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about the envelopes that came with the letters you just talked about. I'd like you to look at this envelope and think about what your reaction to it was. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the first letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside of it before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?

V. ACS Pre-notice Envelope

SET-UP: Now I'd like you to look at this envelope. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the third letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside of it before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?
3. What did you expect to find in this envelope?
4. Would you open this envelope?
5. Would you keep this envelope or throw it away? Why?

VI. ACS/Census Pre-notice Envelope Comparison

SET-UP: Now I'd like you to think about both of these envelopes as I ask you a couple of questions.

PROBE:

1. Do the envelopes seem similar or different? How so?

2. If you see a difference, do you think it means anything? What?

VII. Census Initial Packet Letter

SET-UP: I have a couple more questions about letters for you. Please take a look at this letter again. [Give participant letter.]

PROBE:

1. This is the second letter you received. When I first gave you the envelope with this letter, how much of the letter did you read? Where did you stop?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular about it? If so, what?
3. What would you have done next? Why?

VIII. ACS Initial Packet Letter

SET-UP: Now I have a few questions about this letter. [Give participant letter.]

1. This is the fourth letter you received. When I first gave you the envelope with this letter, how much of the letter did you read? Where did you stop?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular about it? If so, what?
3. What would you have done next? Why?
4. What do you think the main point of this letter is?

IX. Comparison

SET-UP: Now please think about both of these letters.

PROBE:

1. When you first saw the letters, did these two letters seem the same or different? If so, how?

X. Census Initial Packet Envelope

SET-UP: Again, I'm going to ask you a few questions about the envelopes that came with the letters you just talked about. Please look at this envelope [Give participant envelope].

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the second letter you received. When I first gave this to you, did you look at the outside of this envelope before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?

XI. ACS Initial Packet Envelope

SET-UP: Now please look at this envelope again. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the fourth letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?
3. What did you expect to find in this envelope?
4. Would you keep this envelope or throw it away? Why?

XII. Comparison

SET-UP: Now please think about both envelopes.

PROBE:

1. Do the envelopes seem similar or different? How so?
2. If you see a difference, do you think it means anything? What?
3. If these envelopes came to your house in your regular mail, would you be

likely to open one or the other, both, or neither?

A. If one, "Which one would you open? Why?"

B. If neither, Why?

PART 3: SECOND ROUND OF OBSERVATION

I. Census Reminder Postcard

SET-UP: Okay, now I'm going to ask you to switch gears a bit and go back to just looking at some things you might receive again. As before, treat the things I give you as you would if you were at home. Around March 23rd, [show date on calendar] you *might* get this in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud. [Hand participant postcard.]

OBSERVE:

1. Does R seem to read postcard? How much of it?
2. Does R say anything about postcard? If so, what?
3. Does R compare postcard to any mailings? If so, which ones?
4. Does R place postcard in a pile with Census mailings, ACS mailings, neither, or both?
5. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

Anything else?

STANDARD PROBE, if needed

II. ACS Reminder Postcard

SET-UP: Around March 25th, [show date on calendar] you *might* get this in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud. [Hand participant postcard.]

OBSERVE:

1. Does R seem to read postcard? How much of it?
2. Does R say anything about postcard? If so, what?
3. Does R compare postcard to any mailings? If so, which ones?
4. Does R seem to be confused?
5. Does R place postcard in a pile with Census mailings, ACS mailings, or neither?
6. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

Anything else?

III. Census Replacement Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: Around April 6th, [show date on calendar] you *might* receive this packet in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.
[Hand participant packet.]

Note: If R asks whether or not he/she should fill out questionnaire, direct R to simply look through it carefully.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance
 - scan
 - read
 - study
2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - logo
 - mandatory
 - thickness
 - other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R seem to look at/read the cover letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look at it
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

5. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- color
- bold print
- logo
- other

6. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

7. Does R compare this letter to any other letter or postcard? Which ones?
What is R's reaction?

8. Does R realize that this is the same as the earlier census questionnaire packet?

9. Does R ask if he/she should fill out questionnaire?

10. Does R look through the questionnaire?

Ignore it?

Compare it to previous questionnaires?

11. If R looks through questionnaire, does R show any reaction (annoyance, impatience, acceptance...) How so?

12. If R completes the questionnaire, does R put it in a census envelope?

13. If R has already looked through the form, what does he/she do here?

14. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

Anything else?

STANDARD PROBE, if needed

IV. ACS Replacement Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: On April 22nd, [show date on calendar] **you *might* receive this packet in the mail. As before, please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.** [Hand participant packet.]

Note: If R asks whether or not he/she should fill out questionnaire, direct R to simply look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- Color
- ACS name
- mandatory
- thickness
- other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

3. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope or other ACS envelope?

4. How does R take materials out of envelope? Does R read letter before going to the questionnaire?

5. To what extent does R look at/read the ACS cover letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

6. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- bold print
- other

7. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

- "ACS is separate from Census"
- "required by U.S. law"
- "some households, including yours, will receive both"
- "must do both"
- other

8. Does R compare this ACS cover letter to any other letters? Which?

9. Does R realize that this is the same as the earlier ACS questionnaire packet?

10. Does R ask if he/she should complete questionnaire?

11. Does R look through the questionnaire?

Ignore it?

Compare it to ACS or Census questionnaires? Which?

12. If R looks through questionnaire, does R show a reaction (annoyance, impatience, acceptance...) How so?

13. Does R place materials in same place as Census mailings, or with ACS

pre-notice?

15. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.
16. If R already completed the form, what does he/she do here?
17. Does anything happen with the FAQs or ACS brochure?
18. Anything else?

PART 3: DIRECTED PROBES

SET-UP: Okay, now I'd like to ask you a few more questions about some of the mailings you've seen. It's okay if you didn't notice some of the things I might ask you about. As I said before, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

PROBE:

1. When I first gave this [ACS pre-notice letter] to you, did you notice that one letter says that the American Community Survey is separate from the Census?

How do you feel about this?

2. When I first gave this [ACS Initial Packet Letter] to you, did you notice that you will receive both the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census forms?

How do you feel about this?

3. And at that time, did you notice that you are required by law to do both?

How do you feel about this?

Part 5: LIKELIHOOD OF FORM COMPLETION

SET-UP: Now I just have a few questions for you about how likely you would be to complete these forms on your own if you really did get them in the mail.

PROBE:

1. If you received these same materials in your mail, how likely would you be to complete and return the 2010 census form on your own? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

Why?

2. How likely would you be to complete and return the American Community Survey on your own? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely?

Why?

3. How likely would you be to complete and return just one of the two? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

(If very or somewhat likely): Which one would you do, the 2010 Census or the American Community Survey form?

Why?

4. How likely would you be to do neither one of these? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

Why?

5. What kinds of things would you consider when deciding whether to do one, both, or neither of these questionnaires?

PART 7: COMMENTS ON THE MESSAGES

[Show participant pre-notice and initial packet letters]

1. How effective do you think the messages in second paragraph of the letters were to:

a. help you understand that the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey are different?

Very effective, somewhat effective, not effective

b. let you know that you were chosen to receive both questionnaires?

Very effective, somewhat effective, not effective

c. let you know that the law requires that you do both?

Very effective, somewhat effective, not effective

2. How did you feel when you realized you would be required to complete both of these questionnaires?

Very willing, somewhat willing, somewhat unwilling, very unwilling

5. Would this message that you are required to complete both make you feel more likely to complete both, less likely, or wouldn't it make a difference? Why?
6. **[Show Participant Initial letter and Replacement Letter]** Please look at the 2nd paragraph in both letters. Which paragraph do you think would be more effective in getting people to complete the questionnaire?
7. Thinking about the second paragraph in the letters, which of these letters do you think we should send out to people first? Why?
8. Do you have any suggestions on how we can revise any of these messages to make them more likely to motivate people to fill out both questionnaires?

Debriefing:

SET-UP: Before we finish, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about how you handle your mail.

1. What do you typically do when you get your mail?
(Look at it right away or put it aside for another day)
(Glance at/read carefully)
2. Do you typically separate letters from envelopes and throw out the envelopes, or do you keep them together?
3. If you would fill out the questionnaire on your own, how long would you wait before doing it? How long might it take you to send it back?

(Right away, a few days, a week, 2 weeks, 4 weeks)

SET-UP: I'm going to show you two of the envelopes again and ask you a few more questions about them.

4. One of these envelopes has black print on white paper, while the other one has black print on white paper with a green background in two boxes.

4a: Do you think one of these two envelopes would be more noticeable in a stack of incoming mail, or is there no difference between the envelopes in noticeability?

If difference: Which envelope do you think would be more noticeable?

Census
ACS
No difference

4b. Would you be more likely to open one of these envelopes than the other, or would there be no difference?

If difference: Which envelope would you be more likely to open?

Census
ACS
No difference

4c. Would you be more likely to fill out a questionnaire that came in one or the other of these envelopes, or would there be no difference in your likelihood to complete the questionnaire inside?

If difference: Which envelope would make you more likely to fill out the enclosed questionnaire?

Census
ACS
No difference

4d. Do you think that one of these envelopes looks more official than the other or is there no difference in how official they look?

Census
ACS
No difference

4e. Do you think it is more effective to have just black and white on this government survey envelope or better to include a third color, or does it make no difference?

Just black and white
Have a third color too
No difference

4f. How do you feel about the green background on this (ACS) envelope:

like it
do not like it
it doesn't make a difference

4g. Is there another color that would be more effective than the green?

Yes, What color?"
No

Thank you very much for answering our questions. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me or ask me?

APPENDIX D: ACS Messaging Project, Phase 2 Cognitive Testing Interview Protocol (3/3/09)

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____, and I work for the Census Bureau. Thanks for agreeing to help us. Let me start by telling you a little bit about what we will be doing today. Every year, the Census Bureau conducts a number of surveys by mail, and today we're going to look at some of the items that might be mailed to you in 2010. Chances are that you'll be expecting to get something from the Census Bureau because we'll be doing a lot of advertising for the 2010 Census then. So, as I give you these mailings, I'm going to ask you to treat each one as you would if it came to your house. Please go through these as you would at home, as if I were not there, but say out loud what you are thinking. When you've finished with one, I'll give you the next. When you're finished with all of them, I'm going to ask you some questions about the mailings and your reactions to them. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in how these mailings work for you.

Permission to Tape Record

Because it would be hard to keep track of everything you say today, I'd like to tape-record this session [Hand respondent consent form.] Please read this over and sign it. I want you to know that your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be seen by Census employees involved with this project. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can decline to answer any particular question.

Think-out-loud Instructions

As I said before, we are interested in how these mailings work for you. So, while you are looking at the materials I give you, I'd like you to tell me what's going through your mind. Instead of thinking to yourself, I'd like you to think out loud. I would like you to tell me everything you're thinking as you go through the mailings: questions that come to your mind, reactions you're having, and what information you're getting from what you're looking at. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in how the mailings work for you.

TURN ON TAPE RECORDER

STANDARD PROBE:

1. What are you thinking?

PART 1: PRESENTATION OF ENVELOPES AND OBSERVATION

I. Census Pre-notice

SET-UP: Around March 7th, [show date on calendar] you would receive this letter in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do. [Hand respondent mailing.]

OBSERVE:

9. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

10. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- logo
- other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R seem to look at/read the letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

6. Does R say anything about the text? What?

7. Does R put letter back into envelope?

6. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task. Anything else?

II. Census Initial Questionnaire Package

SET-UP: **Around March 16th**, [show date on calendar] **you would receive this in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.** [Hand respondent mailing]

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R asks about whether or not to complete form, ask them just to take a look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- logo
- mandatory
- thickness
- other

3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R look at/read the letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

5. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- color
- bold print
- logo
- other

6. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

7. Does R compare this letter to the pre-notice letter?

8. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task

III. ACS Pre-notice envelope and letter

SET-UP: Around March 18th, [show date on calendar] you would receive this letter in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do. [Hand respondent mailing.]

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read
- study

2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?

- color
- ACS name
- U.S. Census Bureau in green box
- Return address (DOC)
- census logo at bottom
- other

11. Does R say anything:

a.) about the link of the ACS and Census? If so, what?

b.) Anything else? What?

4. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope?

5. To what extent does R look at/read text of letter?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

6. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?
 - bold print
 - other
7. Does R say anything about the text, including:
 - “ACS is separate from Census”
 - “required by U.S. law”
 - “some households, including yours, will receive both”
 - “must do both”
8. Does R compare this ACS pre-notice letter with any census letter?
9. Does R place the ACS pre-notice letter back in its envelope?
10. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

IV. ACS Initial Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: On March 22nd, [show date on calendar] **you would receive this packet in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.** [Hand respondent mailing.]

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R asks about whether or not to complete form, ask them just to take a look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance
 - scan
 - read
 - study
2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - color
 - ACS name
 - U.S. Census Bureau in green box
 - Return address (DOC)
 - census logo at bottom
 - other
3. Does R say anything:
 - a.) about the link of the ACS and Census? If so, what?
 - b.) Anything else? What?

4. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope?
5. How does R take materials out of the envelope? Does R look at the letter before going to the questionnaire?
6. To what extent does R look at/read the cover letter?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look
 - b. glance
 - c. scan
 - d. read
 - e. study
7. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?
 - bold print
 - other
 8. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?
 - "ACS is separate from Census"
 - "required by U.S. law"
 - "some households, including yours, will receive both"
 - "must do both"
 - other
 9. Does R seem to compare this ACS cover letter or mailing package with any other census or ACS letter or package?
 10. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

PART TWO: NEUTRAL PROBING

I. Census Pre-notice Envelope

SET-UP: Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about the envelopes that came with the letters you just talked about. I'd like you to look at this envelope and think about what your reaction to it was. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the first letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside of it before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?

II. ACS Pre-notice Envelope

SET-UP: Now I'd like you to look at this envelope. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the third letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside of it before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?
3. When you first saw this envelope, did you think about who or where it was coming from? If so, what did you think?
4. What did you expect to find in this envelope?
5. Would you open this envelope?
6. Would you keep this envelope or throw it away? Why?

III. ACS/Census Pre-notice Envelope Comparison

SET-UP: Now I'd like you to think about both of these envelopes as I ask you a couple of questions.

PROBE:

1. Do the envelopes seem similar or different? How so?
2. If you see a difference, do you think it means anything? What?

IV. Census Initial Packet Envelope

SET-UP: Again, I'm going to ask you a few questions about the envelopes that came with the letters you just talked about. Please look at this envelope [Give participant envelope].

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the second letter you received. When I first gave this to you, did you look at the outside of this envelope before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?

V. ACS Initial Packet Envelope

SET-UP: Now please look at this envelope again. [Give participant envelope.]

PROBE:

1. This is the envelope for the fourth letter you received. When I first gave you this envelope, did you look at the outside before you opened it?
2. At that time, did you notice anything in particular? If so, what?
3. When you first saw this envelope, did you think about who or where it was coming from? If so, what did you think?
4. What did you expect to find in this envelope?
5. Would you keep this envelope or throw it away? Why?

VI. Comparison

SET-UP: Now please think about both envelopes.

PROBE:

1. Do the envelopes seem similar or different? How so?
2. If you see a difference, do you think it means anything? What?
3. If these envelopes came to your house in your regular mail, would you be likely to open one or the other, both, or neither?

- A. If one, "Which one would you open? Why?"
- B. If neither, Why?

VII Reminder cards

1. **Around March 23, you might get this in the mail** [Census reminder card].

(Any comments?):

2. **Around March 25, you might get this in the mail** [ACS reminder card].

(Any comments?):

PART 3: SECOND ROUND OF OBSERVATION

I. Census Replacement Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: **Around April 6th**, [show date on calendar] **you *might* receive this packet in the mail. Please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do.**
[Hand participant packet.]

Note: If R asks whether or not he/she should fill out questionnaire, direct R to simply look through it carefully.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?
 - didn't look
 - glance
 - scan
 - read
 - study
2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - logo
 - mandatory
 - thickness
 - other
3. Does R say anything about the envelope? If so, what?

4. To what extent does R seem to look at/read the cover letter text?

How much of it?

- a. didn't look at it
- b. glance
- c. scan
- d. read
- e. study

5. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?

- color
- bold print
- logo
- other

6. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?

7. Does R compare this letter to any other letter or postcard? Which ones? What is R's reaction?

8. Does R realize that this is the same as the earlier census questionnaire packet?

9. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

II. ACS Replacement Questionnaire Packet

SET-UP: On April 22nd, [show date on calendar] you *might* receive this packet in the mail. As before, please treat it as you would if you were getting it at your house, and remember to think out loud as you do. [Hand participant packet.]

Note: If R asks whether or not he/she should fill out questionnaire, direct R to simply look through it.

OBSERVE:

1. To what extent does R look at envelope?

- didn't look
- glance
- scan
- read

- study
2. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the envelope?
 - color
 - ACS name
 - U.S. Census Bureau in green box
 - Return address (DOC)
 - census logo at bottom
 - other
 3. Does R say anything:
 - a.) about the link of the ACS and Census? If so, what?
 - b.) Anything else? What?
 4. Does R seem to compare ACS envelope with Census envelope or other ACS envelope?
 5. How does R take materials out of envelope? Does R read letter before going to the questionnaire?
 6. To what extent does R look at/read the ACS cover letter text?

How much of it?

 - a. didn't look
 - b. glance
 - c. scan
 - d. read
 - e. study
 7. Does R seem to notice any physical features of the letter?
 - bold print
 - other
 8. Does R say anything about the text? If so, what?
 - "ACS is separate from Census"
 - "required by U.S. law"
 - "some households, including yours, will receive both"
 - "must do both"
 - other
 9. Does R compare this ACS cover letter to any other letters? Which?

10. Does R realize that this is the same as the earlier ACS questionnaire packet?

11. List any facial expressions or body language related to this task.

PART 3: DIRECTED PROBE

SET-UP: Okay, now I'd like to ask you a few more questions about some of the mailings you've seen. It's okay if you didn't notice some of the things I might ask you about. As I said before, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

1. These envelopes have the words "U.S. Census Bureau" written over "the American Community Survey" in a green box. What, if anything, does that mean to you?
2. If you received this envelope in the mail, how likely would you be to open this envelope? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.
3. What if this green box had the words "American Community Survey," but did not include the words, US Census Bureau, as this one does. Would you be more likely to open the envelope, less likely to open it, or wouldn't this make a difference? Why?

Part 4: LIKELIHOOD OF FORM COMPLETION

SET-UP: Now I just have a few questions for you about how likely you would be to complete these forms on your own if you really did get them in the mail.

PROBE:

1. If you received these same materials in your mail, how likely would you be to complete and return the 2010 census form on your own? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

Why?

2. How likely would you be to complete and return the American Community Survey on your own? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely?

Why?

3. How likely would you be to complete and return both of these forms? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely. (NOTE: If likely to do both, skip the following questions and go to # 6 below)

4. How likely would you be to complete and return just one of the two? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

--- (If very or somewhat likely): Which one would you do, the 2010 Census or the American Community Survey form?

Why?

5. How likely would you be to do neither one of these? Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not likely.

Why?

6. What kinds of things would you consider when deciding whether to do one, both, or neither of these questionnaires?

SET-UP: I'm going to show you two of the envelopes again and ask you a few more questions about them.

6. One of these envelopes has black print on white paper, while the other one has black print on white paper with a green background in two boxes.

6a: Do you think one of these two envelopes would be more noticeable in a stack of incoming mail, or is there no difference between the envelopes in noticeability?

If difference: Which envelope do you think would be more noticeable?

Census

ACS

No difference

6b. Would you be more likely to open one of these envelopes than the other, or would there be no difference?

If difference: Which envelope would you be more likely to open?

Census
ACS
No difference

6c. Would you be more likely to fill out a questionnaire that came in one or the other of these envelopes, or would there be no difference in your likelihood to complete the questionnaire inside?

If difference: Which envelope would make you more likely to fill out the enclosed questionnaire?

Census
ACS
No difference

6d. Do you think that one of these envelopes looks more official than the other or is there no difference in how official they look?

Census
ACS
No difference

6e. Do you think it is more effective to have just black and white on this government survey envelope or better to include a third color, or does it make no difference?

Just black and white
Have a third color too
No difference

6f. How do you feel about the green background on this (ACS) envelope:
like it
do not like it
it doesn't make a difference

6g. Is there another color that would be more effective than the green?

Yes, What color?"
No

We're finished with my questions. Do you want to ask any question or offer any comment?

Thank you for participating in this research.