

Talk Soon: Evaluating the Implementation of Text and Email Contact Strategies at the U.S. Census Bureau

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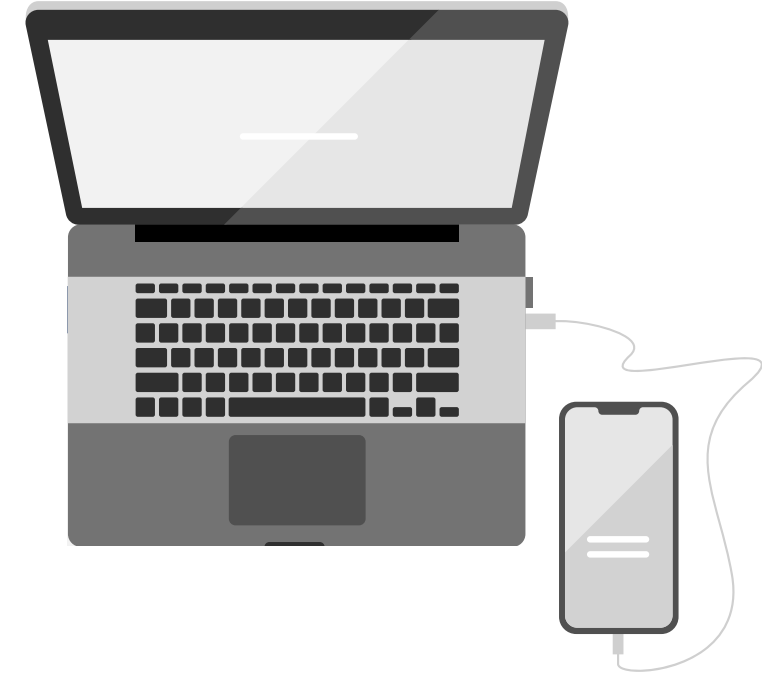
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Presentation Overview

- Background on Text & Email Procedures
- Document review (Memos & Training)
- Focus groups
- Findings and next steps

Background Information

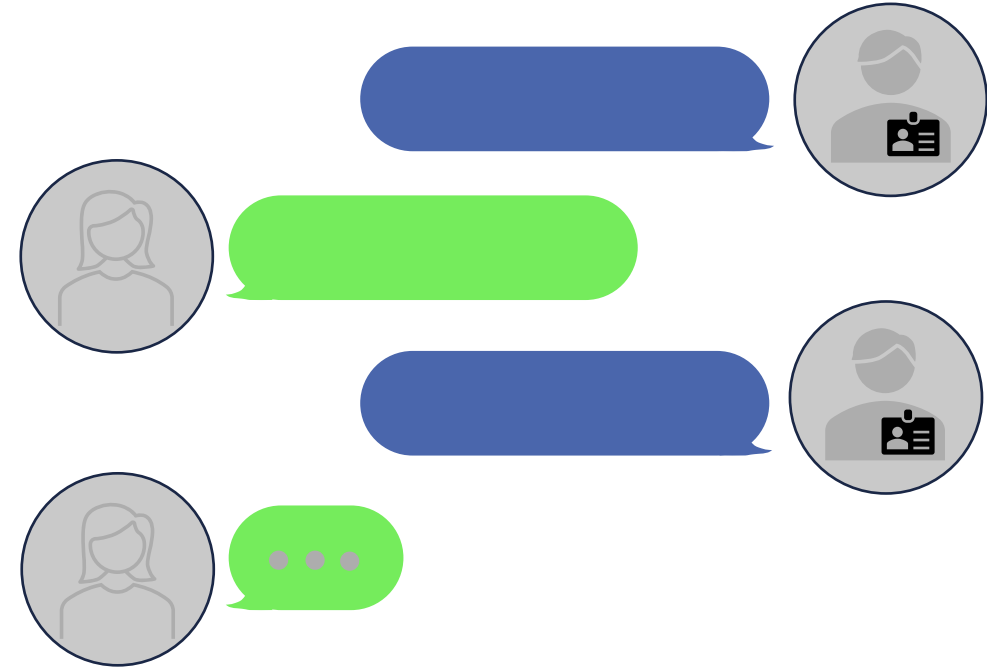
- “Respondent Text Messaging Protocols” was sent to all Field Representatives (FRs) in August 2021.
 - FRs are now *approved* to reach out to respondents by text or email.
 - The memo included Texting Guidelines and Texting Templates.
- “Contact History Instrument (CHI) Changes” was sent to all FRs in June 2022.
 - FRs are now *required* to record text and email in CHI.



22 Months Later...

Stakeholders have questions

- Are FRs using text and email?
- How are FRs using text and email?
- Does text and email usage vary by survey?
- Does text and email usage vary by geography?
- Do text and email usage impact response rates?



Texting Guidelines

- 1) Use only the approved Texting Templates to reach out to a respondent.
- 2) Never ask survey questions or conduct the survey via text, as this is a violation of Title 13 confidentiality.
- 3) Never send a picture of your Census Bureau ID via text message to respondents to prevent possible fraud/impersonation.
- 4) Always be polite and professional in the messaging. Limit text messaging respondents to between the hours of 9 o'clock AM and 9 o'clock PM.
- 5) Texting should only be attempted if requested by the respondent or after you have made several attempts to reach the respondent by phone or personal visit.
- 6) Only use phone numbers that are listed in the case or numbers that the respondent has given you. Do not use phone numbers from your own independent research.
- 7) Only text the eligible respondents or proxy respondents to ensure they meet the age requirement for communicating with Census Bureau staff.
- 8) Field staff may not save any contact information for respondents on their phones.
- 9) Text conversations must be deleted after the conversation is complete.

Texting Templates

Reaching out to a respondent for the first time via text, after you have attempted reaching the respondent via phone and personal visit:

- *The US Census Bureau needs your help. I'm [NAME], an interviewer in your area. Please let me know the best time to reach you or to set an appointment.*

Responding to a respondent who asks about responding via text message:

- *I cannot complete the survey over text message, but I can call or visit at a time convenient for you.*

Responding to a respondent when they ask you to what survey they are in:

- *I'm happy to explain over the phone which survey your household/business/property has been selected for. You should have received a letter recently with all of the information explaining this survey.*

Responding to a respondent when they ask you to verify legitimacy:

- *Please visit www.census.gov/programs-surveys/surveyhelp.html to verify my employment and for information about the surveys we conduct.*

Responding to a respondent when they ask you for a number to call to verify legitimacy:

- *Please call [RO NUMBER] for the [REGION] Regional Office to verify my employment and for information about the surveys we conduct.*

Responding to a respondent when they have responded with date/time for you to call:

- *Thank you for setting an appointment. I look forward to speaking with you on [DATE] at [TIME].*

Reminding a respondent about an appointment:

- *This is a friendly reminder that we have an appointment on [DATE] at [TIME]. I look forward to speaking with you.*

Reaching out to a respondent as a last resort before closeout:

- *The US Census Bureau is still in need of your help! I'm [NAME], an interviewer in your area. There are only a few days left to participate in this very important survey. Please let me know when I can call or visit at a time convenient for you.*

Reaching out to a reluctant respondent (for FS and Type A follow up only):

- *The US Census Bureau needs your help. I'm [NAME], an interviewer in your area. I understand you have concerns with our survey. I would be happy to discuss these concerns at your convenience in-person or over the phone.*

Responding to a respondent who has disclosed PII:

- *To protect your privacy, please do not respond with any personal information about you or your household/business/property. I am not authorized to conduct this survey by text message or answer any detailed questions about the survey or our protocols. May I call you now to complete the survey?*

Responding to a respondent when they ask you what is considered personal information:

- *Personal information is any information that can be used to identify you and your household members, such as age, date of birth, or ethnicity. Please don't text me any information that we ask for in the survey, as I will call or visit you to conduct the interview.*

Reaching out to a Manager or Building Owner for the first time via text, after you have attempted reaching them via phone and personal visit:

- *The US Census Bureau needs your help. I'm [NAME], an interviewer in your area. Please let me know the best time to reach you or to set an appointment. Reply at your earliest convenience.*

Thanking the household for their participation, post interview:

- *Thank you for taking the time to participate in our important survey. Your input is very valuable!*

Document Reviews: Trainings

Current FRs are expected to read all memos.

New FRs receive onboarding training – however, the training may not adequately cover text and email procedures outlined in the memos yet.

FRs receive survey-specific training – however, the training on text/email varies:

- Survey 1: Does not provide guidance on text or email in the FR Manual.
- Survey 2: Includes the guidelines and templates as an attachment to their FR Manual.
- Survey 3: Gives guidance on emails, not texting.
- Survey 4: Does not provide guidance on procedures, however, does explain how to fill out CHI.

Focus Groups: Sampling

FRs were randomly selected from the following three groups:

SAMPLE GROUP 1

In the last 90 days:

0 Text & 0 Email

30+ Attempts

SAMPLE GROUP 2

In the last 90 days:

5+ Text and/or Email on
a specific longitudinal
survey

30+ Attempts

SAMPLE GROUP 3

In the last 90 days:

5+ Text and/or Email on
other surveys (not the
one in Sample Group 2)

30+ Attempts

Focus Groups: Selection

FR Focus Group - Scheduling

Please fill out this 2-question survey to identify the best time to attend a focus group on using text and email to contact respondents.

1. Are you willing to participate in a 1.5-hour virtual focus group on using text and email to contact respondents? *

Yes

No

1. Are you willing to participate in a 1.5-hour virtual focus group on using text and email to contact respondents?

[More Details](#)

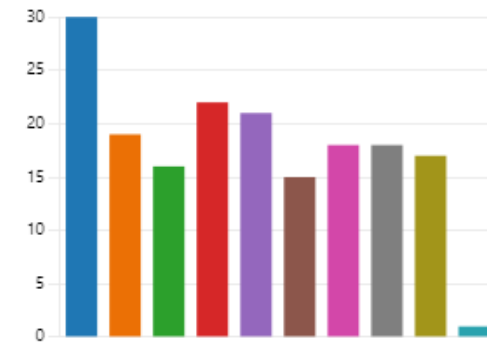
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	52
<input type="radio"/> No	8



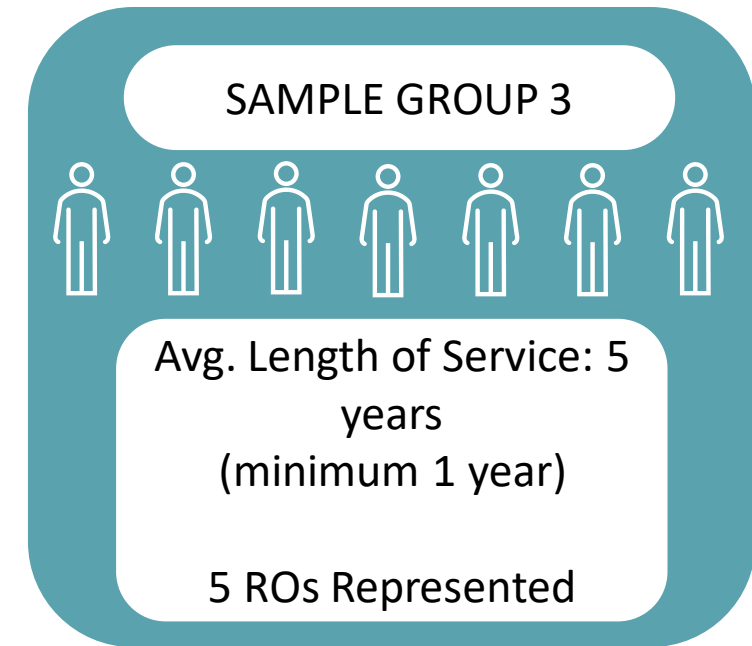
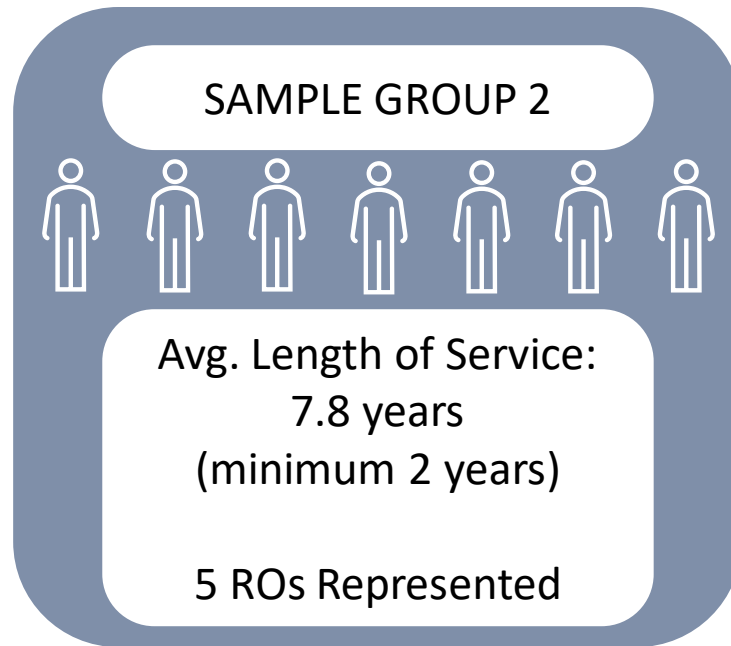
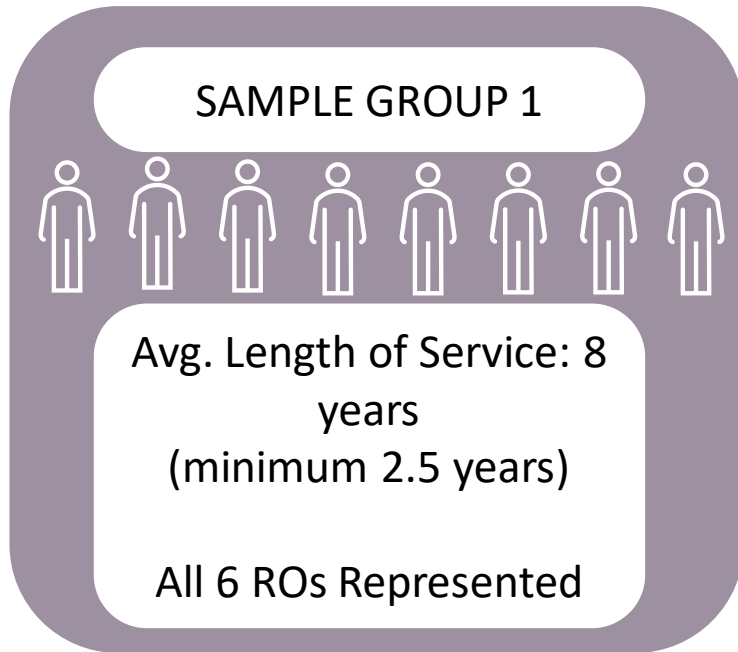
2. When are you available to virtually attend a 1.5-hour focus group? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tuesday 3/12 - 11:00 a.m. - 1:00...	30
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday 3/12 - 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 ...	19
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday 3/12 - 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 ...	16
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday 3/13 - 11:00 a.m. - ...	22
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday 3/13 - 1:00 p.m. - 3:...	21
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday 3/13 - 3:00 p.m. - 5:...	15
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday 3/14 - 11:00 a.m. - 1:0...	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday 3/14 - 1:00 p.m. - 3:00...	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday 3/14 - 3:00 p.m. - 5:00...	17
<input type="checkbox"/> I have a conflict for all dates/tim...	1



Focus Groups



Surveys currently work on varied by FR in each group, including ACS, AHS, CED, CEQ, CPS, NCVS, NHIS, SIPP, and Decennial

Focus Group Questions

Training: Before this focus group, have you learned of any procedures for communicating with respondents by text or email?

Procedures: How do you use text and email to communicate with respondents?

CHI: How often do you use CHI to record text or email?

Improvements: How would you change text/email for communicating with respondents?

Focus Group Findings: Training

When asked about training,

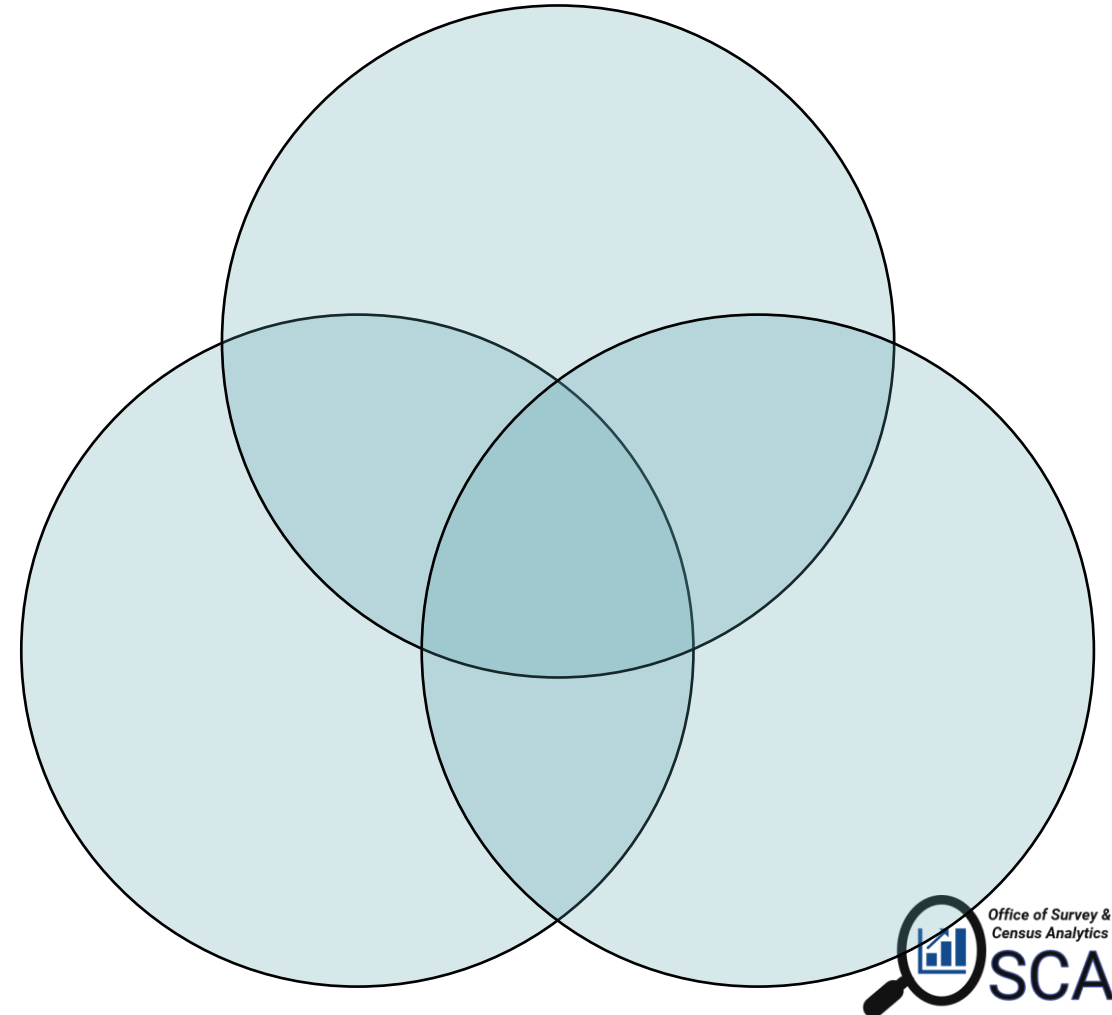
- 22 (100%) of FRs received no targeted training on texting or emailing respondents.
- 10 FRs recall receiving a memo on texting/emailing.
- 4 FRs shared that they learned some procedures on texting or emailing in a FR survey manual.
- 7 FRs shared that they received some guidance from their Field Supervisors (FSs) on texting or emailing.*

There were no notable differences on the responses between sample groups.

Focus Group Findings: Procedures

When asked about text and email procedures, all Focus Groups said:

- Texting is valuable.
- Rarely use email.
- Texting varies by respondent age.



Focus Group Findings: Procedures

Topic	Group 1: No Texters	Group 2: Longitudinal Texters	Group 3: Other Texters
Have you ever texted?	7/8 (87.5%)	7/7 (100%)	7/7 (100%)
In the last 30 days, how much have you texted?	3 FRs said they've texted at least once.	6 FRs said they've texted at least 10 times.	6 FRs said they've texted at least 10 times.
Primary reasons for using text?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule appointments. • Responding to Inbound • Send reminders. • Last effort. • Send survey information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule appointments. • Send appointment reminders. • Only text longitudinal cases. Do not text new to sample cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following every phone call or personal visit. • Following phone calls where voicemail doesn't work.
Have you read the texting templates?	7 of the FRs have not read the templates.	5 of the FRs have not read the templates.	2 of the FRs have not read the templates.
Other findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents will return a phone call with a text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delete texts and call logs after case ends. • Saving contact information varies - difficulties identifying inbound texts and phone calls. • Send picture of business card to prove their identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inbound text refusals. • Phone numbers for texting from research (true people, spokeo). • Retain texts until the case is completed, others delete immediately.

Focus Group Findings: CHI

When asked how often do you use CHI to record text and email:

- Record texts in Case Notes.
- Sample Group 1:
 - 1 FR never used text/email
 - 3 FRs use text/email and record in CHI every time.
 - 4 FRs use text/email and never record in CHI (2 said they didn't know how)
- Sample Group 2 and 3:
 - 7 FR says they always enter text/email CHI
 - Enter every text (outgoing or incoming) as a separate CHI
 - Enter text threads as single CHI record
 - Reasons for not recording in CHI varies (making attempts appear low, inbound texts during non-working hours, text as a strategy during a different attempt)

Focus Group Findings: Improvements

Topic	Direct Quotes
The need for training on guidelines.	“Training specifically focused on texting respondents and text etiquette.”
Ensure all regions and surveys are providing the same guidance.	“Guidelines need to be the same across the board.”
Ensure all guidelines are straight-forward and easy to understand.	“Am I allowed to text the respondent first? Am I not allowed until the respondent gives permission?”
Encourage more use of text.	<p>“We need to utilize text more. We need to reach respondents – especially younger respondents.”</p> <p>“Why isn’t the Census Bureau in the 21st Century? Don’t we realize that people like to text and if want respondents in younger demographics to participate that’s how we’re going to reach them.”</p>
Consider updating the texting templates.	<p>“I just want to communicate with people. I don’t want boiler plate language.”</p> <p>“I want people to know I’m a real person. I’m not trying to scam you.”</p> <p>“You have to be personable in the field. You are trying to convince someone to discuss their personal information. How can I be personable with these templates?”</p> <p>“I don’t want to come across as someone trying to reach you about your car’s warranty or sell you solar panels. People are shut off by these templates.”</p>
Reduce respondent burden.	<p>“Why can’t I verify vacancy status by text? Why do I have to call to confirm that the unit is still vacant?”</p> <p>“I've had people refuse via text message and I'm not allowed to accept that. I have to get it by a real phone call?”</p>
Personal device/work device.	<p>“I do think there is a liability and a risk with all of us using our own phones and I don’t understand why the census won’t provide us with work phones.”</p> <p>“We use personal cell phones which can be hacked. We should have Census cell phones.”</p>
Separate procedures for emails and texts.	“I think emails should be excluded because no one is using that.”

Key Findings from the Focus Groups

- Texting usage varies both by geography and survey.
 - FRs on longitudinal surveys primarily use text messaging to schedule future appointments.
 - FRs on current surveys are more likely to use text messaging as an additional strategy to make contact following unsuccessful personal visits and telephone attempts.
- The recording of texts in CHI varies by FR, which has implications to any CHI data analysis.
- Some FRs may be uncomfortable using text to communicate with respondents.
- FRs believe that text messaging is an important resource to gaining cooperation from respondents.

Was the policy implemented as intended?

Next Steps

- Provide Census Field Management with a Research & Findings paper that includes recommendations to improve the implementation of this policy:
 - Updating training for current and new FRs. Consider developing a job aid.
 - Ensuring guidelines are standardized across all regions and surveys.
 - Revising guidelines and text templates to address the concerns found during these focus groups.
 - Conduct a cost benefit analysis to providing FRs with census issued cell phones or a secured messaging system.
 - Redesign CHI to capture the ways FRs are using text and emails.

Questions?

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