Text Messages to Field Interviewers
An Innovative Approach to Direct Communications

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Background

About Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)
• Face to face data collection
• Difficult survey- long interview length, low 2018 response rate
• Adaptive design through case prioritization: H,M,L

Case prioritization
• Instructions: spend more effort on high priority cases, visit high priority cases early in data collection, work little on low priority cases
• Protocols often not followed by interviewers
Why Direct Communication in SIPP

In person data collection
• Unpredictable by nature- sometimes necessitates new quick directions
• Interviewers self manage their workloads
• Location of cases often most important attribute to interviewers (not priority)

Workforce
• Usual SIPP workforce is about 50% new hires-Inexperienced workers may need more directions/reminders
• Interviewers focus on performance metric takes into account response rate not priorities
Why Text Messages

Direct
• Messages can get muddled or forgotten when passed through field hierarchy
• Messages sent to cell phones get to interviewers when they are working away from WiFi

Cheap
• Potential to be less than 50 cents per message
• Automation minimizes man hours needed to implement

Flexible
• Turn around from determining message to sending- minutes
• Different interviewers can be sent different messages at different times
Our Messages

Goals:
• Improve communication with interviewers
• Increase interviewer effort and timeliness on high priority cases
• Decrease effort on low priority cases

Message Details:
• Each Interviewer receives at most one text a week
• Messages go out at 4 different times each Friday
• Options-Reminder, Feedback Positive, Feedback Constructive, No Message
Welcome Message- This is a message from the SIPP team. You will receive helpful text messages during data collection. Please contact your supervisor with any concerns.

Reminder Message- SIPP: Your case priorities have been updated. Please transmit and work accordingly. Contact your supervisor with any concerns.

Feedback Message- SIPP: You worked your cases according to priorities last week. Thanks for your hard work! Contact your supervisor with any concerns.

Or: SIPP: To ensure data quality, please work your cases according to priorities. Contact your supervisor with any concerns.
Sending Process

Collaborations
• Privacy Compliance Branch/ Privacy Policy Research Committee
• Field Division and SIPP Survey Director
• Communications Division- Currently using communications vendor

Vendor
• One text message vendor has FedRAMP certification
• Product designed for emails but can be used for texts
• Existing contract with vendor included basic text package
Sending Process

Data Sources
• Interviewer phone numbers and time zone from personnel directory
• Contact history information filled out by interviewers after each and every action

Programming
• Determine interviewers currently working on SIPP
• Evaluate compliance with prioritization protocols for previous week
• Randomize between message types (including no message)
• Randomize times (taking time zone into account)
Sending Process

Using Vendor Platform

• Set up campaign to take phone number and message type and time as input
• Campaign will handle the different sends (16 total)
• When manually uploading- securely upload only one

API

• Goal was to automate the send with an API connection from Census server to the vendor, but security paperwork required an approval that is waiting in backlog
Limitations

• Approved technology limits customization
• Data protection policy greatly limits content of message
• Interviewers may opt out of the messages
• Some interviewers may not have cell phones
Current Status, Future Plans

• Messages are being sent weekly to interviewers
• Impact of texts will be evaluated after data collection ends
• Looking to implement in other cases
• Potentially get more customized/detailed
• Hope to automate in the future
Thanks!

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