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

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Message Text

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

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Thanks!

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