

Conducting Remote Focus Groups with the 2020 Census Customer Service Representatives

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U.S. Census Bureau

FedCASIC, April 13, 2021



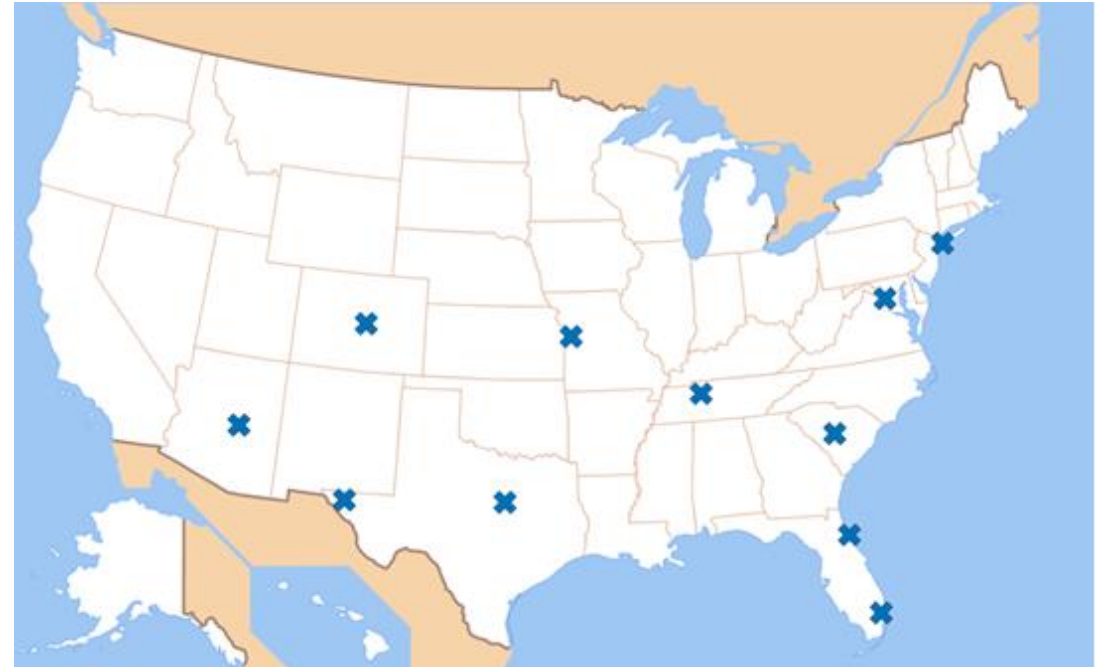
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Background

- 2020 Census response modes (% of addresses reporting via that mode)
 - Internet (53.5%)
 - In-person (32.9%)
 - Mail (12.5%)
 - Phone (1.2%)
 - Managed under a Decennial Contract – Maximus
 - 13 million calls received total
 - Majority handled by Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
 - 5 million handled by Customer Service Representative (CSR)
 - Average handle time was 9 minutes across all calls (including caller questions)
 - Average handle time for a census enumeration was 13 minutes

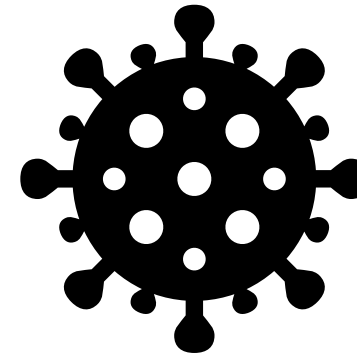
Telephone operation

- 11 call centers across the U.S.
- Over 7,000 CSRs hired
 - 12 non-English languages supported
- Availability
 - March 9-October 15, 2020
 - Hours varied by language
 - 7 days a week
 - 7am - 2am EST
- Calls routed to next available CSR across all locations



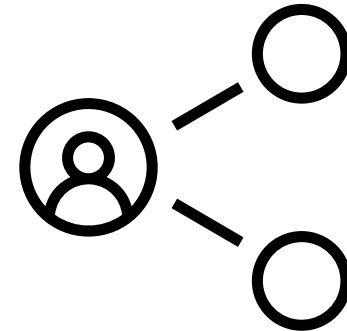
Qualitative evaluation of telephone operation

- Plan
 - Site visits
 - CSR Exit Survey
 - CSR Focus Groups
- Issue
 - Pandemic restricted travel and required social distancing which affected the site visits and the planned focus groups



This talk

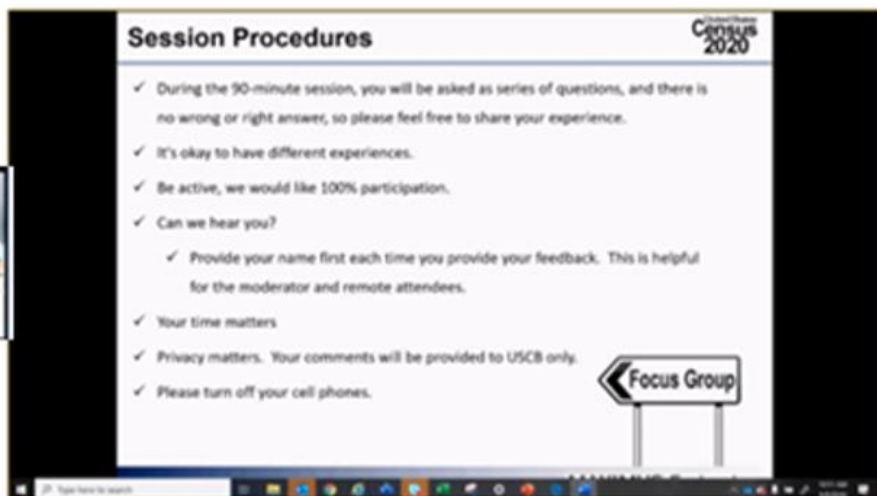

- Share lessons learned conducting Remote Focus Groups during a pandemic
 - What we did
 - What worked well
 - What we would have changed



CSR focus groups: What we did

	Pre-Covid Plan	Actual
Moderators & Note taker	In person	Remote – Skype for Business
Number of focus groups	2 per call center – one morning and one in the afternoon	1-4 per call center because of social distancing
Number of CSRs per focus group	8-10	3-10
Location of focus group	1 call center room	Majority of the time 1 call center room Twice we had 2 rooms conferenced together
Observers	Limited	Unlimited
Questions and topics	Hiring, training, system usability, call script quality, quality of census information collection, any other issues	Same with additional topic on pandemic
CSR preparation	Questions provided ahead of time and displayed in the focus group room on a screen for CSRs to see	Same
Recordings	Audio – with consent	Audio and Video – with oral consent Not all focus groups shared video of the room/moderator

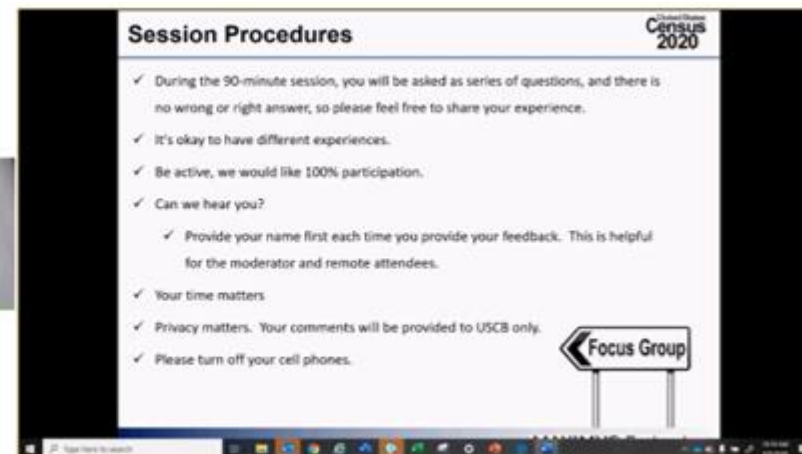
CSR focus groups: What we did



Session Procedures 2020 Census

- ✓ During the 90-minute session, you will be asked a series of questions, and there is no wrong or right answer, so please feel free to share your experience.
- ✓ It's okay to have different experiences.
- ✓ Be active, we would like 100% participation.
- ✓ Can we hear you?
 - ✓ Provide your name first each time you provide your feedback. This is helpful for the moderator and remote attendees.
- ✓ Your time matters
- ✓ Privacy matters. Your comments will be provided to USCB only.
- ✓ Please turn off your cell phones.

← Focus Group



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← Focus Group

What worked well

- Dry run of the Skype for Business Connection
 - Conducted with each site a few days before each session
- Technical lead at each site in the room during the session
 - Technical lead could iron out any issues
 - There were often issues with the sound
 - Video in the room was spotty
- We had a back up system in place – Microsoft Teams
 - We never used it

What worked well

- Opportunity to observe/moderate sessions
- Unlikely that staff would have seen as many sessions if in person
 - Watching sessions in real time helps with analysis
- Opportunity to rotate moderators and give staff the chance to practice moderating
 - A few leads aimed to be at all sessions
 - Helped with analysis
- Having moderators who spoke the languages

What worked well

- Sending privacy notice and oral consent to record
- Census Bureau policy office agreed that oral consent to record was sufficient (we captured this consent on the recording)
- We asked each CSR to say aloud **“I’ve read the notice and I give consent to be recorded for this focus group.”**



**Privacy Notice
For Individual Participants
2020 Census CQA Focus Groups**

This study will focus on your experience as a Customer Service Representative (CSR) for the 2020 Census. We want to better understand the experience you and callers had during the 2020 Census. Results from this focus group will be used to improve future call center operations at the U.S. Census Bureau. This focus group is being conducted under the authority of 5 U.S.C., Section 301 and 44 U.S.C., Section 3101.

A screen and audio recording of this focus group will be captured for qualitative analysis and quality assurance. Participating in the focus group implies consent for the purposes stated. Your participation is voluntary and your answers will remain strictly confidential.

Your privacy is protected under the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C, Section 552a). Only Census Bureau staff directly involved in the research project will have access to your data. Your information is secured by the Census Bureau by strictly adhering to the provisions of the Privacy Act, and other regulations and policies to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the information.

What worked well

- Access to list of participants
- Moderator has an index card with the first name of each participant
 - Eliminates the need to ask for spelling
- Arrange the cards in the order of introductions.
 - Instead of ping pong introductions, encourage participants to go in order around the room, then you have a visual picture of the room
- Ask participants to state their name before they speak
 - Tally how often they talk on the cards and then call on those who are more quiet
- Any late substitutions only require a few changes to the cards
- Name tents at the site did not help the moderator
 - Could have helped the participants

What worked well

- Providing questions ahead of the focus group
- Having a visual of the questions during the discussion

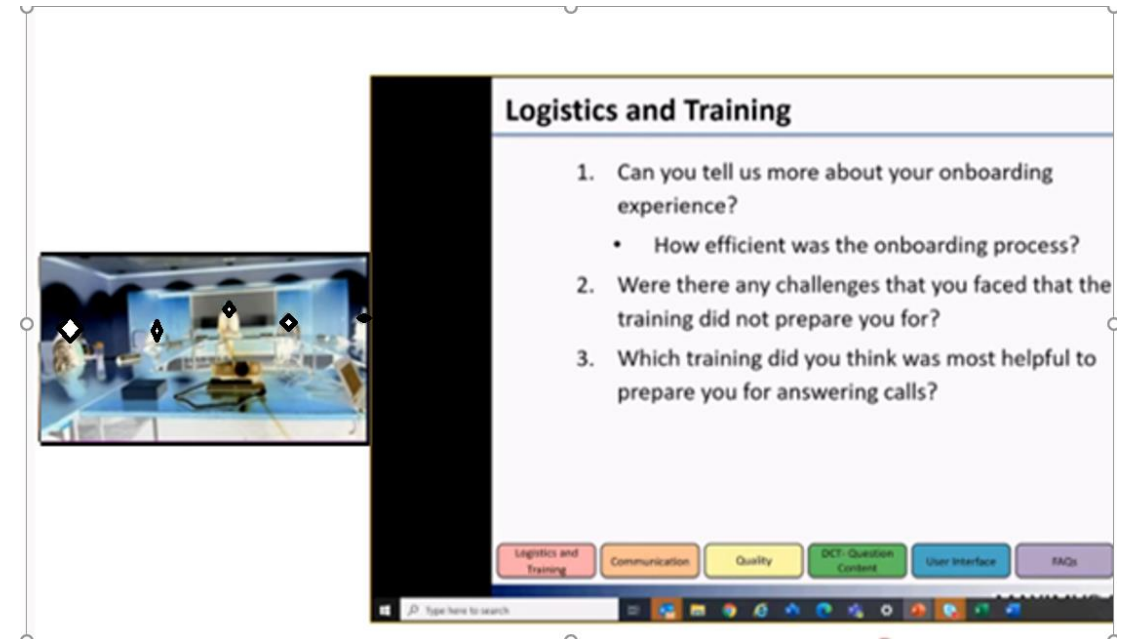
Logistics and Training United States
Census
2020

1. Can you tell us more about your onboarding experience?
 - How efficient was the onboarding process?
2. Were there any challenges that you faced that the training did not prepare you for?
3. Which training did you think was most helpful to prepare you for answering calls?

Logistics and Training Communication Quality DCT- Question Content User Interface FAQs COVID 19 Pandemic:

What we would have changed

- Sound quality
 - One microphone was problematic when the focus group was large and the room was large
 - CSRs had to walk to the mic to speak because of social distancing requirements
- Solution
 - Give each participant a microphone
 - Dry run with microphones



What we would have changed

- Large number of participants
 - Difficult to make sure all participants were heard
 - Dominant participants
- Solution
 - Limit focus group size to 4-6 for remote



What we would have changed

- When conducting a concurrent session there were two rooms with 4 people in each room
 - We had CSRs who spoke language A and language B in both rooms
 - Better for all speakers of language A to be in one room and language B in the other room
 - Toggling the camera and session back and forth between the two rooms was problematic.
- Solution
 - Ensure groups are homogeneous on topic of interest
 - Limit toggling camera between rooms

What we would have changed

- Cameras
 - At some locations, a camera showed the focus group room
 - Did not really help the moderator figure out who was talking (unless they had to walk to the microphone)
 - Everyone had masks on
 - Always ask the participant to state their name prior to talking
 - Moderators did not always share their camera either
 - Technical issues
 - We did not notice any downside to not sharing the camera view
 - We didn't debrief CSRs on whether they would have preferred the camera on or off
- Solution
 - For work-related focus groups may not need camera – consider trust factor
 - Stating names prior to talking helps

Conclusions

- Remote focus groups can be conducted with success
 - More observers can partake
 - Cost savings due to elimination of travel
- Homogeneous & smaller (~4-6 participants) are more successful
- Need coordination
 - Technical issues will occur
 - Practice, practice, practice
 - Audio quality is key to success
- Trust is involved with participants and moderators
 - Consider whether using video will help
 - Important to share privacy notices and consent for recording

Thank you

Contact: elizabeth.may.nichols@census.gov

Acknowledgements: Kevin Zajac, Andy Welton, Amber Weems, Mike Purcell, CQA staff, Maximus staff,
Marcus Berger, Jonathan Katz, Joanna Fane Lineback, Alda Rivas