

# The Challenges of Household Composition and Dynamics in Collecting High Quality Data

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**FedCASIC**

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# Presentation Overview

**01** Household Complexity & Survey Research

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**02** The Household & Data Quality  
on the Survey of Consumer Finances

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**03** Processes for capturing household complexity

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**04** Contexts for capturing household complexity:  
The role of Culturally Responsive Research

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**05** Looking Ahead

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# Introduction to the Problem

# Research Statement

## **Problem Addressed:**

- Household-level survey research often relies on mapping the household and rostering its members to collect standardized data.
- This leads to inherent tension between the complexities of real-world household arrangements and the need to make these arrangements legible for research purposes.

## **Goals of this presentation are to:**

- Examine why understanding household complexity is a key component of high-quality data in household surveys.
- Demonstrate how the research team on the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF) has addressed the challenges of household complexity through a series of culturally responsive research trainings for field interviewers.
- Provide a roadmap for other household surveys striving to better navigate household complexity.

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# Background on Households & Survey Research

# How do social scientists understand the household?

## **A social construct (created through human action & meaning)**

- Stems from assumptions about how humans live and work
- Single housing unit and its inhabitants
- Not always the same as the kinship/family unit

## **In the US, based on the nuclear family**

- Positioned as the center of responsibility and financial planning (DeLuca 2017)

## **Reinforced by cultural norms shaping finance, law, & policy**

- For example, the contemporary mortgage, student debt, and pension crises



# Why is the household important in survey research?



**The household provides a standard sampling unit and basis for comparing data.**

**Respondents often identified through 2 stages:**

- A random sample of dwelling units
- 1 person in the dwelling unit selected to interview
  - Who provides information matters
  - Various approaches used, depending on the study (opinion vs fact questions; household vs individual survey)

# What are some approaches used to select a survey respondent within a household?

## General Social Survey (GSS)

- Rosters all adults in the household over 18, then random selection used to identify respondent (Kish Method)

## National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP)

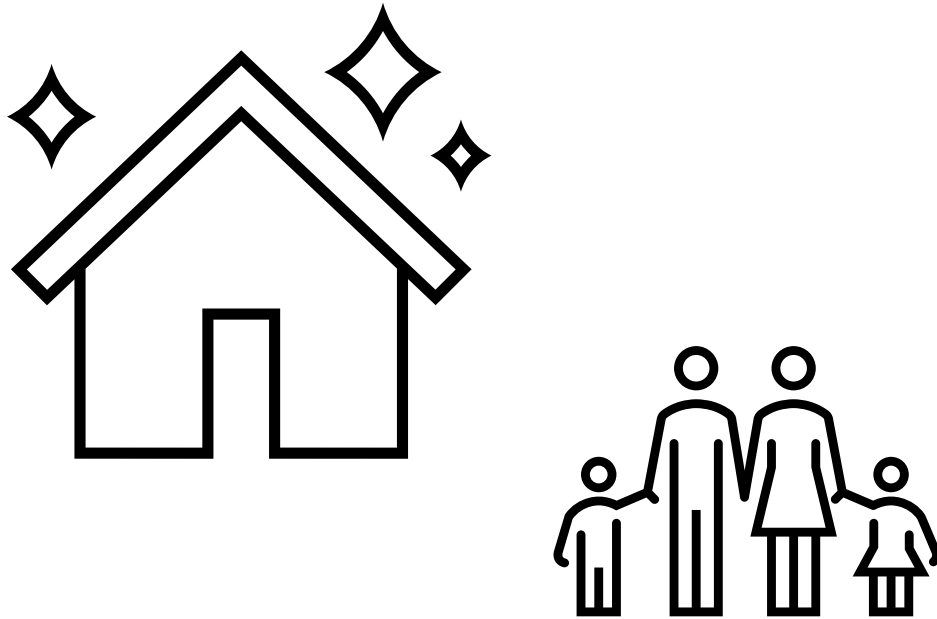
- Leveraged existing household rostering in a partner study, to select an adult in a specific age-range & meeting certain criteria

## National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR)

- Allows any adult household member to participate (based on availability & willingness)



**Household surveys** are distinct in that they collect information about **the entire household, not just a member** of that household.



- “Household surveys typically designate one household member as a principal person ‘to whom individuals are linked and their relationships coded’ (Bruce & Lloyd, 1997: 214)”
- This person could be called various things such as “head of household” “householder” “person 1” or “reference person”
- The principal person is not typically defined by objective criteria but relies on self-identification by a member of the household.
- There can be divergence between a study’s interpretation of who a principal person should be and a household’s interpretation of who a principal person should be.

Household surveys present challenges in identifying the principal person and rostering the household due to social complexities.

- **Household arrangements in the U.S.**
  - Move away from a more traditionally defined “head of household” of the 1950’s
    - Not a new issue, but has intensified with demographic shifts over the past several decades
    - More women entered the workforce
    - Rise in same-sex couples
    - Fewer nuclear families - more single-person, single-parent, and non-family households than before
- **Migration & cultural diversity in family arrangements**
  - Extended families (more than 2 generations living in a household)
- **Diverse economic strategies**
  - Expanded families (including near relatives) to pool scarce resources
  - Informal economic activities; the gig economy
- **COVID**
  - Impacts on the workforce & household arrangements

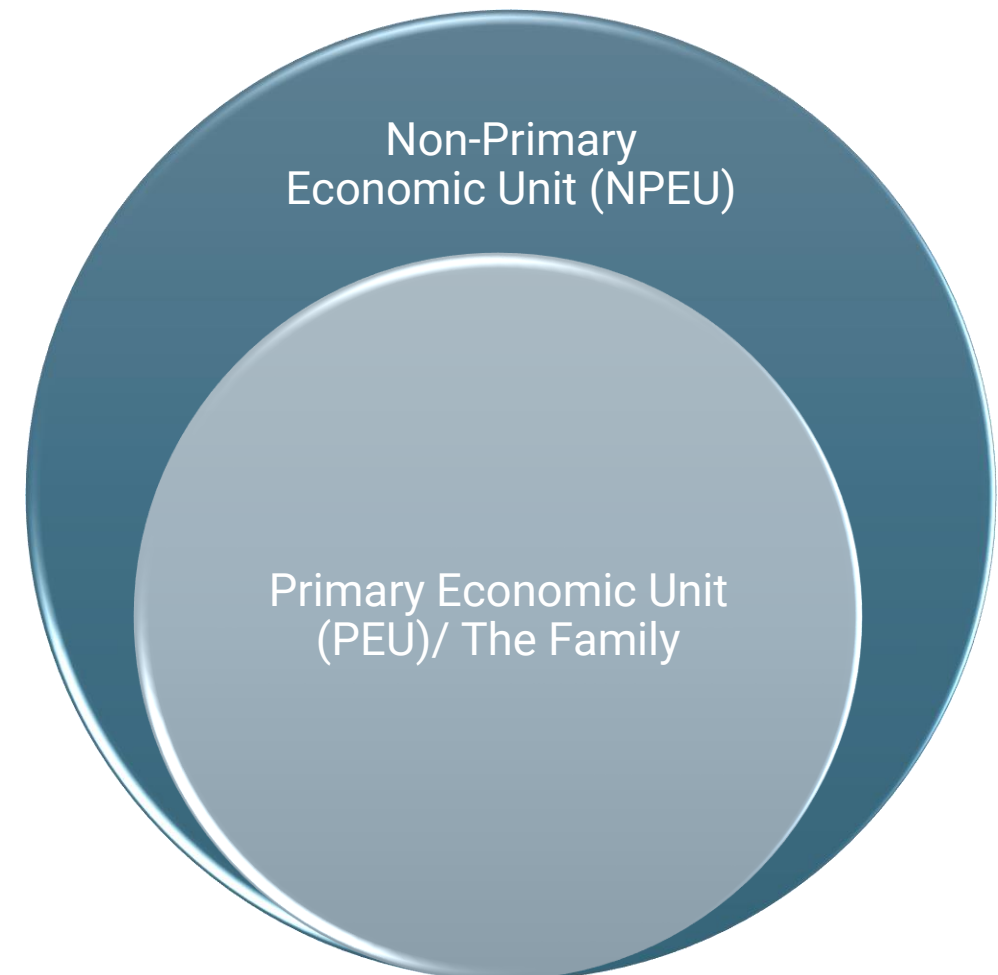
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# The Household and its Relationship to Data Quality on the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF)

On the SCF, a household unit is divided into a Primary Economic Unit (PEU)—the family—and everyone else.

- SCF is a household financial survey
  - Financial relationships important
- The PEU is intended to be the economically dominant single person or couple
  - Whether married or living together as partners
  - Plus all other persons in the household with whom they are financially interdependent.
- Unlike some other government studies, the SCF considers the PEU the “family” (not the entire household.)
- Mapping the PEU can reveal divergent understandings of household relationships or roles
  - PEU typically mapped by identifying the Head of Household
  - Because the HOH is reliant on self-identification, there can be a mismatch in PEU mapping between respondent & field interviewer
  - An interview with the wrong respondent makes case invalid

### The Household on the SCF



Addressing differing understandings of household relationships is important because high-quality data relies on a standardized approach to rostering the household.

The SCF mitigates the challenges of household complexity in two main ways:

### **1. Established processes and structures to capture complexity**

- Intensive field interviewer training prior to data collection
- Job aids/materials
- The survey instrument itself

### **2. Newly developed training modules – Culturally Responsive Research**

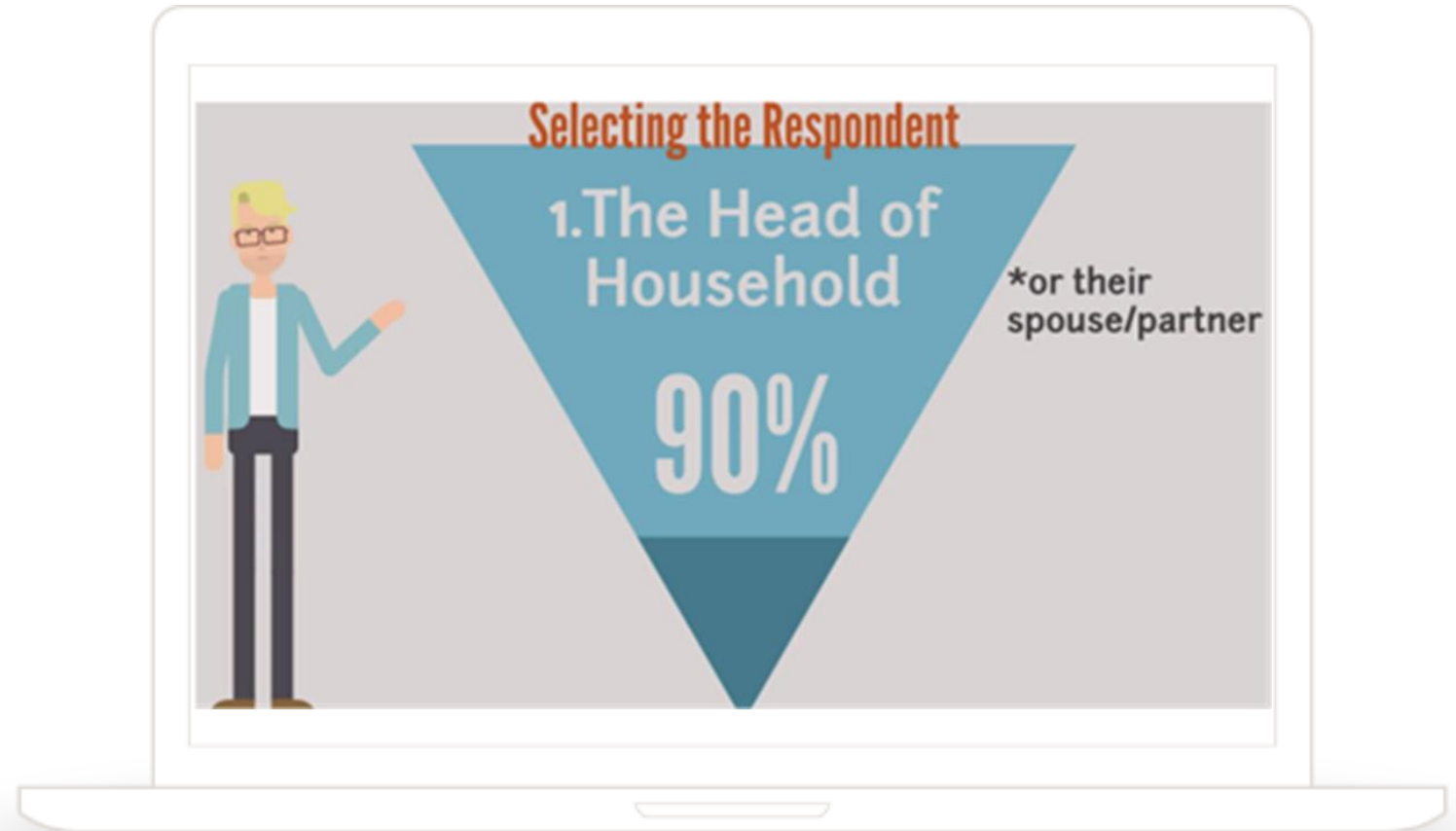
- Social science concepts regarding household diversity
- To contextualize household arrangements
- More effectively leverage the established processes and structures

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# Processes for navigating household complexity on the SCF

**Selecting the proper respondent is discussed at length in field interviewer training.**

Our animated training videos include modules on the PEU, Head of Household, and processes for respondent identification.



A dynamic paper Screener walks interviewers through identifying the respondent.

**SCF**  
SURVEY OF CONSUMER FINANCES

**Survey of Consumer Finances  
Screening Procedures**

Contact your FM before proceeding if any of the following occur:

- You are unable to confirm an AP address exactly as it exists in CM-Field
- A proxy is identified
- A respondent is discovered to be deceased or incapacitated
- You identify an eligible housing unit but no one aged 18 or over lives there

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**Introduction**

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**Confirm AP Address**

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**Identify Head of Household**

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**No Head of Household: Ask who owns residence/name on lease**

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**No Head of Household & No Single Owner or Renter: Ask who is closest to age 45**

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**List Screener**

# Screeners

IDENTIFY THE RESPONDENT. THE FOLLOWING PERSON WILL BE ASKED AS THE RESPONDENT FOR THE HOUSEHOLD.

NAME: Norina Joaze Martenson

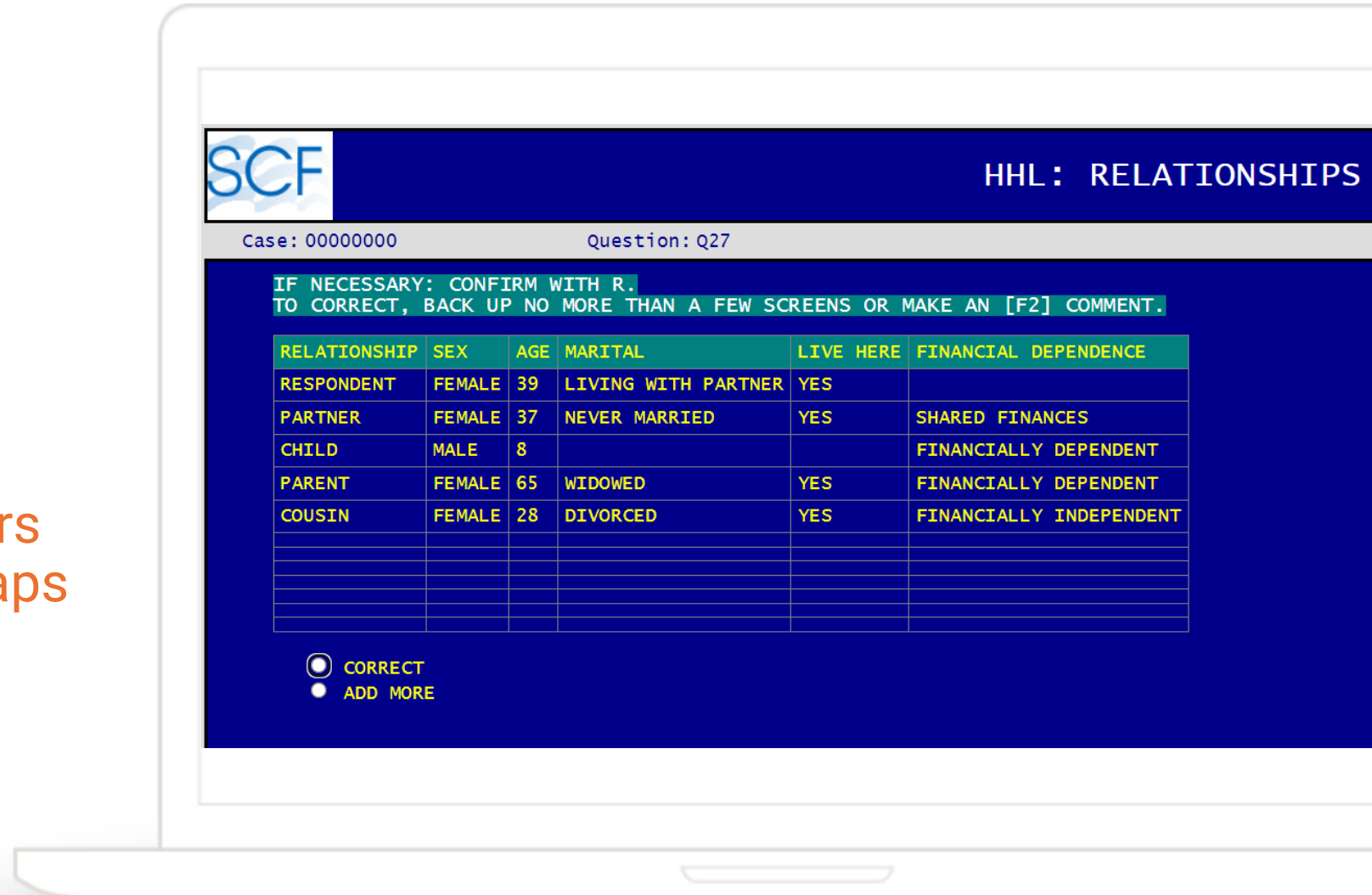
EDUCATION: Head of Household (OAH)

SELECT TO COMPLETE SCREENER



The SCF instrument is designed to capture household complexity while ensuring a consistent data collection process.

A series of questions rosters household members and maps their relationships.

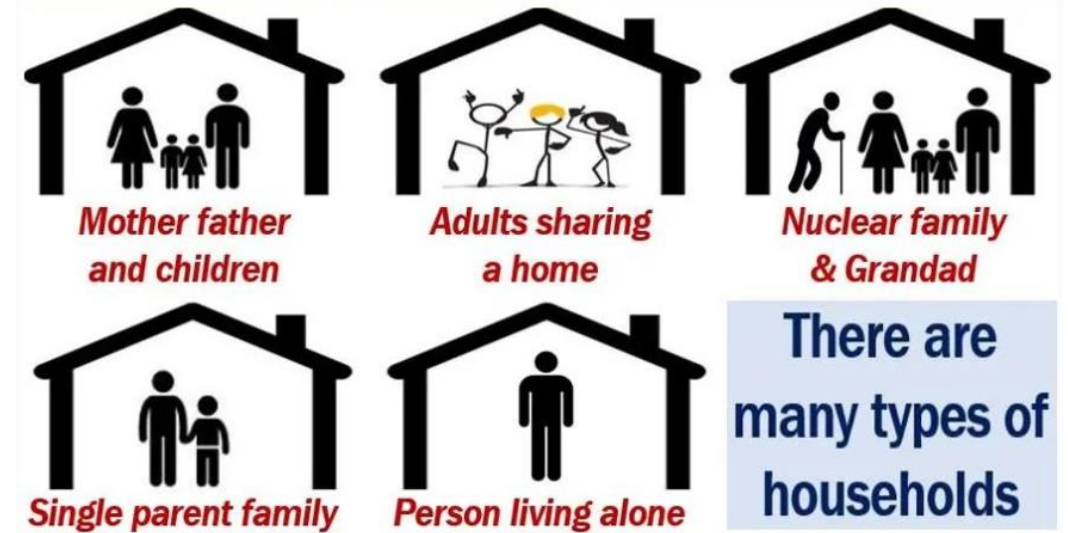


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# Contexts for navigating household complexity on the SCF: Culturally Responsive Research

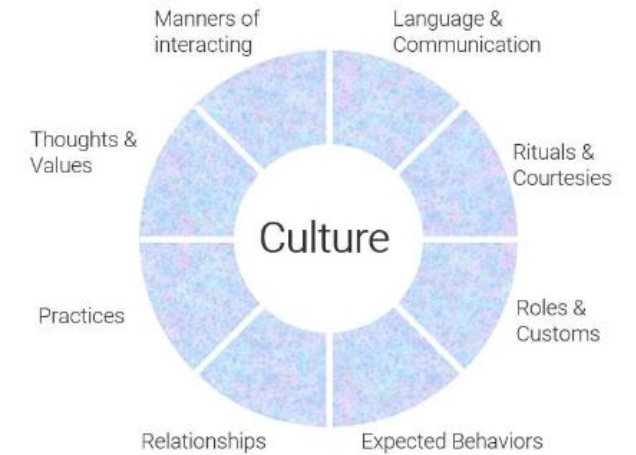
Due to the importance of well-understood household relationships to data quality on the SCF, we have made a concerted effort to sensitize field interviewers to the range of household diversity they may encounter through a series of Culturally Responsive Research training modules.

<p><b>Implemented</b></p>	<p>Through our weekly project newsletter, using videos, reflection activities, and text.</p>
<p><b>Focused</b></p>	<p>On exploring the social and cultural elements of households</p>
<p><b>Leveraging</b></p>	<p>Existing trainings, job aids, and survey instrument in more effective ways</p>



## Training modules include the following topics:

- **What is culture?**
- **How does culture shape the household?**
- **What is Culturally Responsive Research?**
- **Linguistic diversity**  
(variation in how words are used; families defined)
- **Gender & the household**  
(who has access to records, who makes decisions)
- **Cross-cultural definitions of a “stranger”**  
(approaching unknown households)
- **Ethnic diversity and family arrangements**  
(extended & expanded families)
- **Non-verbal communication**  
(taking off shoes entering a home, signs of respect)
- **Awareness of various religions & holidays**  
(when not to approach homes)



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# Looking Ahead

Culturally Responsive Research encompasses topics such as:

- Who benefits from the research?
- Who is represented in the research?
- How legitimate is the research to diverse perspectives?
- **How is the research initiated?**
  - Field interviewers play a unique role in initiating participation in many studies.
    - Our goal is to continue to create opportunities for enhanced cultural responsiveness on the SCF
    - And to provide a framework for other household studies that have faced similar challenges, so they can more effectively engage with diverse households

## Next Steps:

Work with SCF field staff to assess existing trainings

- What works?
- What needs revision?

Identify future training topics, such as:

- U.S. racial diversity & the household
- Health & the household (COVID)

Establish a dynamic set of training modules

- To provide the necessary context for field interviewers to interpret household complexity
- So that we can continue to collect high-quality data
- Adapt quickly to emerging issues impacting households and survey research

# Thank you.

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