Three Final IGEN Research Proposals

Federal Establishment Survey Nonresponse Web Site with Agency Links

Background:
One of the purposes of the IGEN is to act as a resource and a clearinghouse of information on establishment nonresponse. The IGEN collaborated to author a paper which was presented at the November 1998 COPAFS conference. This paper included a summary of the relevant research issues in establishment survey nonresponse but, importantly, also included an overview of current and recent research being conducted by member agencies. Many of these projects are unpublished or incomplete and information about them is not readily available to outside researchers. Unfortunately, once this paper was concluded, there was no formal mechanism left by which to continue the process of sharing latest or newly "discovered" research.

Goal:
This project will formalize the concept of a clearinghouse, providing a mechanism for the ongoing identification and presentation of establishment nonresponse research. It is proposed that all IGEN participating agencies create and maintain web sites which will be linked to a home page (maintained by the BLS). The home page, developed collaboratively, will identify a set of common establishment non response issues, definitions, concerns, and be linked to agency maintained web pages that will present each agency's past and current research on nonresponse. Additionally, each web site shall have links to the other participating agencies such that a reader can easily jump from one agency's site to another and be able to access other research on establishment nonresponse. While this project is devoted to nonresponse in establishment surveys, it is anticipated that similar pages with information about nonresponse research in Federal household surveys would ultimately also be linked to these pages.

Method:
The method for such a project is fairly simple. Each agency will be responsible for building, testing, and maintaining its own web pages (outside the agency's firewall). The IGEN will design the 'establishment survey nonresponse research' home page, develop the contents of the common pages to be linked to all participating agencies and design a generic web page each individual web site can use. IGEN members will be responsible for specifying and collecting information from their respective agencies to post to their agency's web pages. It will be up to individual agencies to decide where in their overall agency web site these pages will reside.

Costs:
Costs for this project would be primarily for staff time to work on content and layout for the web pages. Additional, but likely less costly, would be staff time necessary to program and maintain the web pages. This could fall to staff already involved in maintaining an agency's web site.

Tailoring Survey Procedures to Increase Establishment Survey Response

Background:
Although for most surveys, researchers attempt to standardize as much of the procedures and materials as possible, this project would investigate the utility of modifying procedures for data collection for different establishments. Establishments differ in a variety of ways that may affect their ability to report requested survey data. While households may differ in size or composition, differences between one establishment and another are potentially much larger than in households. These differences may make the reporting task for any particular establishment quite different from another in the same survey. If characteristics of the establishment make reporting for that establishment more difficult, their level of cooperation may be reduced.

Goal:
This project would identify and test methods of tailoring survey procedures for particular establishments or groups of establishments in order to facilitate survey reporting.

Method:
Participating agencies might test and compare similar tailoring methods, or might test alternative methods of tailoring procedures as proof of the general concept.

Specific examples of potential projects for this proposal are below.

Profiling Large Operations
Large or influential operations, (who are likely to have numerous survey contacts), can be profiled to maintain information about them that might aid in future data collection. These profiles are kept by the agency outside of survey contacts and contain information specific to that individual establishment. This enables customized handling of that establishment on future contacts based on known desires or characteristics of the establishment. To test profiling as a method of tailoring survey procedures, this project would first document which statistical agencies are currently doing this, what information can be kept in these profiles, what information may increase cooperation, and how these profiles can best be used. This would be followed by experimental comparisons of operations who have been profiled compared to those who have not to assess the impact of profiling on survey cooperation.

Effective Enrollment and Questionnaire Routing Through an Establishment
In self-administered mail questionnaire surveys, the exact routing of questionnaires within sampled organization, and the identities of the ultimate informants, is often not known. The probability of response may be influenced by the path the questionnaire takes within the firm: who receives it, whether there are multiple informants involved, and how many people handle the instrument. This basic research would document these paths, in a qualitative way, and would correlate them in a general way with survey outcomes and other independent factors such as organizational structure, size, and survey design and administration characteristics. Initial research would likely involve conducting in depth interviews with various members of establishments as well as with field staff who are currently involved in collecting data from establishments.

Once relevant information about establishment structure is collected, systematic tests could be conducted to determine where in the establishment is the best office/division to approach, when is it best to approach the establishment, how to go about obtaining permission to collect data, and how to handle obtaining the authority to collect vs. actually getting the data.

Refusal Conversion Strategies for Initial Survey Contacts

This project will explore conversion of initial survey respondents to survey cooperators. Initial refusals will be followed up after "cooling off" periods (that may be varied in length) and asked to participate in the survey again. Will time have softened their initial convictions and refusals? Sampled establishments who refuse to participate during initiation of survey data collection also often provide reasons for refusing to participate. This project will also assess whether reasons for refusing change over time and whether they are related to an refusal's 'convertability'. Other factors that may indicate the liklihood of converting an initial survey refusal will also be tested. Results would help direct survey resources to those units that have the potential for conversion.

This project would allow development of standard coding of reasons for refusal, so general types of refusals could be compared across agencies.

Costs:
Costs would be dependent upon what projects were specifically undertaken by the agency.

Customer Satisfaction and Survey Cooperation

Background:
Federal Agencies have recently initiated efforts to measure customer satisfaction. Data providers are one subset of customers of Federal Statistical Agencies. This project would be designed to support Government Performance and Results Act customer service activities required by Federal Agencies. This would be an opportunity to develop a standard set of indices and data collection protocols that could be used across federal information gathering agencies. Standard questions and procedures would then be available for use by any agency requiring customer satisfaction indices for data providers.

Goal:
The objective of this study would be to define and measure customer satisfaction of data providers and explore its relationship to survey cooperation. This would allow participating agencies to not only track customer satisfaction, but also to gain insight into the effects of customer satisfaction.

Method:
Initial work would involve identifying appropriate areas of data provider customer satisfaction and developing measures for them. These standard measures would then be used to collect information from past, present, or potential data providers. Information could be collected as part of ongoing survey contacts, as follow up contacts or in completely separate surveys. Ratings for these measures would then be compared across survey cooperators and non-respondents. Ratings could also be tracked to determine if customer satisfaction changed as measures to increase survey cooperation are implemented.

Costs:
Costs would involve development and testing of the customer satisfaction indices, as any new questionnaire. Therefore, development of the questions would likely require substantial questionnaire design and pretest work. Additional data collection costs would depend on whether these were used in stand alone surveys or added as additional questions on other survey contacts. In addition to data collection, the obvious costs associated with tabulation and analysis. However, if these costs have already been budgeted as part of GPRA activities in the agency, they may not require substantial additional costs.