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**STATISTICAL POLICY  
WORKING PAPER 38**

**Summary Report of the FCSM-GSS Workshop on  
Web-Based Data Collection**

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**Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology**

**Statistical and Science Policy  
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs  
Office of Management and Budget**

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**The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology  
(December 2004)**

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## Preface

This volume of the *Statistical Policy Working Paper* series contains summary highlights of the **Workshop on Web-based Data Collection**, sponsored jointly by the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) and the American Statistical Association's (ASA) Government Statistics Section (GSS). The meeting was held Monday, April 26, 2004, at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in Washington, DC.

### The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology

Chartered by the OMB, the FCSM is an interagency committee dedicated to improving the quality of federal statistics. The FCSM was founded in 1975 by Maria E. Gonzalez of the Office of Statistical Policy in the OMB. OMB invited individual statisticians, economists, and statistical program managers working in the Executive Branch of the federal government to participate as members of the FCSM, based on their particular experience and expertise. The initial focus of the FCSM was on recommending standards for statistical methodology to be followed by federal statistical agencies, investigating problems that affect the quality of federal statistical data, as well as making suggestions for improving statistical methodology in federal agencies. Since 1975, the FCSM has published a working paper series, sponsored seminars and research conferences on federal statistics, created ongoing interest groups focused on specific statistical issues, and established a grant program to fund cutting edge research on statistical methodology.

The FCSM carries out most of its work through its subcommittees, program committees, and interest groups:

- Subcommittees are established to explore some particular aspect of statistical methodology and produce a specific product, guidance, or recommendations. A current subcommittee is assisting OMB with the revision of Statistical Policy Directives on Standards for Statistical Surveys and Standards for Publication of Statistics. The FCSM is exploring other topics for examination by subcommittees, as well.
- Program committees are temporary and are established to organize a workshop, conference, or seminar. They may also produce a report in this working paper series to document the proceedings.
- Interest groups are ongoing groups that draw together individuals interested in a common aspect of statistical methods or data quality, so that they can interact, exchange information, explore issues related to the topic, and produce products and services of interest to their members. The FCSM currently sponsors the Confidentiality and Data Access Committee and two interest groups on survey nonresponse – for households and for establishments.

## **FCSM-GSS Workshop on Web-based Data Collection**

In summer 2001, the Administration released the President's Management Agenda – a strategic plan for improving management and performance of the federal government. Among the five government-wide goals the plan spelled out was Expanded Electronic Government. This requirement, among other things, provides that federal statistical agencies should use the Internet for data collection and dissemination. An FCSM Subcommittee on Web Surveys was established to explore the challenges facing federal statistical agencies as they move to Internet data collection and to help identify research issues that must be addressed in the near future. The Subcommittee determined that a workshop would provide valuable input for developing a research agenda. The intent of the Workshop on Web-based Surveys was to bring together experts to discuss issues and exchange experiences on collecting survey and census data over the Internet. A primary goal was to inform, and listen to, OMB staff who direct the government's expanded use of the Web on issues facing statistical agencies in conducting Web-based surveys/censuses.

The Workshop consisted of two sets of concurrent sessions in the morning, providing panel discussions on two parallel tracks – one set on person or household data collections and the other on business surveys. These were followed by a plenary session in the afternoon that reported highlights from the morning presentations, presented some general guidance from the OMB on implementation of the E-Government Act, and provided some preliminary recommendations for next steps.

Attendance at the one-day meeting was limited by invitation to around 75 people. About 20 participants took part in the program, representing federal statistical agencies, academia, and the private sector research community. Topics addressed by the speakers ranged from design, usability, and technology issues to sampling, coverage, and data quality. Mode effects, confidentiality and authentication, response and nonresponse issues, and data editing were touched on under those general topics, as well.

The members of the FCSM Subcommittee, who served as the Planning Committee for the Workshop and are the co-editors of this report, are Gerald Gates (Chair), Wendy Alvey, Dennis Fixler, and Nancy Kirkendall. The ASA's GSS handled registration and logistical matters for the conference. The Committee wants to thank the BLS for use of its conference facility and to especially recognize John Bosley, BLS, who made the physical arrangements for the Workshop. Thanks also go to Brian Harris-Kojetin, Chair of the FCSM, who provided assistance throughout the Workshop and preparation of this report.

For both the Workshop and this volume, the FCSM Subcommittee strived to present a balance between the household and business tracks. However, it is important to note that more progress has been made in converting surveys to Web-based instruments on the business side. This is true, in part, because of the greater facility with technology in the

economic sector, compared with the added complications of access and authentication for the general population. Building general-purpose instruments for the Web that incorporate the detailed skip patterns needed for complex household questionnaires also presents a challenge.

## Summary Report

This report presents highlights from the Workshop on Web-based Data Collection, as well as providing some additional background papers that help describe the current state-of-the-art. The report does not pretend to cover either subject in its entirety. Instead, it attempts to focus on some of the federal statistical agencies' most current experiences on the subject and draw some conclusions as to what efforts may be needed next to ensure a safe and successful transition of data collection to the Internet.

Section 1 provides the reports of the rapporteurs in each of the concurrent sessions and recommendations for next steps from the plenary session. Section 2 presents three background papers (prepared for other purposes) that are reprinted here with permission from the authors. They helped set the stage for the discussions in each session. Section 3 contains a few electronic links to additional background papers that provide further information on current research in Internet surveys. These papers, plus the references they cite, provide a basic introduction to the current state-of-the-art for federal Web surveys. The contents of all of the papers are the responsibility of the authors – any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the FCSM, the GSS, or the OMB. The material in Section 1 of this volume has been read by the speakers and underwent a limited editorial review; the reprinted papers were reformatted slightly, but the content is unchanged. Although the authors may have originally obtained their own technical reviews, this effort did not include a formal referee process. Corrections and changes were either made by the authors, themselves, or cleared through them by the editor. Final layout of the papers was done by the editor, Wendy Alvey. Minor changes of a cosmetic nature were considered the prerogative of the editor.

This volume will be available electronically via the FCSM Web site at [www.fcsm.gov](http://www.fcsm.gov).



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