

Chapter 8.

Data Collection and Capture for Group Quarters

8.1 OVERVIEW

All living quarters are classified as either housing units (HUs) or group quarters (GQ). An HU is a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live separately from any other people in the building and that are directly accessible from outside the building or through a common hall.

GQs are places where people live or stay, in a group living arrangement that is owned or managed by an entity or organization providing housing and/or services for the residents. These services may include custodial or medical care, as well as other types of assistance, and residency is commonly restricted to those receiving these services. People living in GQs usually are not related to each other. GQs include such places as college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities, workers' dormitories, and facilities for people experiencing homelessness. GQs are defined according to the housing and/or services provided to residents, and are identified by census GQ type codes.

In January 2006, the American Community Survey (ACS) was expanded to include the population living in GQ facilities. The ACS GQ sample encompasses 12 independent samples; like the HU sample, a new GQ sample is introduced each month. The GQ data collection lasts only 6 weeks and does not include a formal nonresponse follow-up operation. The GQ data collection operation is conducted in two phases. First, U.S. Census Bureau Field Representatives (FRs) conduct interviews with the GQ facility contact person or administrator of the selected GQ (GQ level), and second, the FR conducts interviews with a sample of individuals from the facility (person level).

The GQ-level data collection instrument is an automated Group Quarters Facility Questionnaire (GQFQ). Information collected by the FR using the GQFQ during the GQ-level interview is used to determine or verify the type of facility, population size, and the sample of individuals to be interviewed. FRs conduct GQ-level data collection at approximately 20,000 individual GQ facilities each year.

During the person-level phase, an FR collects the GQ survey information from sampled residents using a bilingual (English/Spanish) GQ paper questionnaire to record detailed information for one person. FRs collect data from approximately 195,000 GQ sample residents each year. All of the methods described in this chapter apply to the ACS GQ operation in both the United States and Puerto Rico, where the survey is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS). Samples of all forms and materials used in GQ data collection can be found at www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/GQ/index.htm.

8.2 GROUP QUARTERS (FACILITY)-LEVEL PHASE

The GQ data collection operation is primarily completed through FR interviews. The FRs may obtain the facility information by conducting either a personal visit or a telephone interview with the GQ contact. Each FR is assigned approximately two sample GQ facilities each month, and interviews are conducted for a period of 6 weeks.

The GQ-level interviews determine whether the FR samples all, some, or none of the residents at a sampled facility for person-level interviews. The FR verifies the sample GQ information and records up to two additional GQ types, if they exist at the same structure. The GQFQ is programmed to determine the appropriate GQ population to sample when more than one GQ type is identified, assigning the correct type code(s) based on GQ contact responses to the questions. The information obtained from GQ-level interviews is transmitted nightly to Census Bureau headquarters through a secure file transfer.

Previsit Mailings. This section provides details about the materials mailed to each GQ facility before the FR makes any contact.

GQ Introductory Letter. Approximately 2 weeks before the FRs begin each monthly GQ assignment, the Census Bureau's National Processing Center (NPC) mails an introductory letter to the sampled GQ facility. The letter explains that the FR will visit the facility to conduct GQ- and person-level data collection. It describes the information that will be asked for by the FR during the visit, the uses of the data, the Internet address where they can find more information about the ACS, and Regional Office (RO) contact information. This letter is printed at NPC using print-on-demand technology, which merges the letter text and the sample GQ name and address. There are 12 RO-specific letters generated for each sample month.

GQ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Brochure. The color, trifold brochure contains FAQs about the ACS and GQ facilities, and is mailed with the GQ introductory letter. Examples of the FAQs are “What is the American Community Survey?,” “Do I have to answer the questions on the American Community Survey?,” and “Will the Census Bureau keep my information confidential?” Similar brochures are sent to sample GQ facilities in Puerto Rico and Remote Alaska.

GQ State and Local Correctional Facilities Letter. FRs may mail another letter to selected correctional facilities after the GQ introductory letter is sent, but before calling to schedule an appointment to visit. This letter was developed to assist FRs in gaining access to state and local correctional facilities, although the GQ operation does not require FRs to send the letter. The letter asks for the name and title of a person with the authority to schedule FR visits and to coordinate the GQ data collection. It also provides information about the ACS and the dual nature of the FR visit to the facility, and includes a form to return to the RO with the contact name, title, and phone number of a designated GQ contact. A separate letter is also mailed to sampled federal prisons, but it is mailed directly from the Bureau of Prisons (BoP). Special procedures are established for the BoP data collection through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Census Bureau and the BoP.

Initial Contact With GQ Facility

In order to conduct the GQ-level interviews for the assigned facility, the FR is instructed to try first to make the initial contact by telephone. If successful in reaching the GQ contact (usually the facility administrator), the FR uses the automated GQFQ—which is available in both English and Spanish to collect information about the facility (such as verifying the name and address of the facility) and to schedule an appointment to visit and complete the GQ-level data collection phase.

If the GQ contact refuses to schedule an appointment for a visit, the FR notifies the RO and the RO staff again try to gain the GQ contacts cooperation. If this attempt at scheduling an appointment is unsuccessful, the FR then visits the GQ facility to try to get the information needed to generate the sample of residents and to conduct the person-level interviews. If still unsuccessful, the RO or FR explains the mandatory nature of the survey, what the FR is attempting to do at the facility, and why.

Visiting the GQ Facility

Upon arrival at the facility, the FR updates or verifies the Special Place¹ (SP) and GQ name, mailing and physical address, facility telephone number, contact name(s), and telephone number(s). Using a flashcard, the FR asks the GQ administrator to indicate which GQ-type code best describes the GQ facility. The GQ contact can identify up to three different GQ-type codes at one address.

The FR generates a person-level sample from all, some, or none of the residents at the facility, depending on the size of the facility and the GQ-type code or codes assigned during the visit. When multiple type codes are assigned to the facility, only those people in the sampled GQ-type code are included in the universe for person-level sampling. The FR records any other GQ-type

¹ A Special Place is the entity or organization providing housing and/or services for the residents of the group quarters. For example, it is the university with multiple dormitories or the correctional facility with units housing inmates. Sometimes the Special Place and the group quarters are one in the same, such as nursing homes or group homes.

codes identified at the sample GQ address, and the address information is updated for future ACS GQ sample selection. If none of the codes are the same as the sampled GQ-type code, the type code that identifies the largest population is used for determining the population for person-level sampling. If the GQ type code assigned during the visit is out of scope for data collection, no residents will be sampled.

After determining that the GQ facility is in scope for GQ data collection, the FR asks for a register of names and/or bed locations for everyone that is living or staying at the sample GQ facility on the day of the visit. This register is used to generate the sample of residents to be interviewed. If a register is not available, the FR creates one using a GQ listing sheet. The listing sheet contains preprinted GQ contact and facility address information.

The FR uses the sampling component of the GQFQ instrument to verify the register provided by the GQ contact person. The instrument proceeds automatically to the beginning of the sampling component after the FR has entered all required facility information and the GQ contact person verifies that there are people living or staying there at the time of the visit. If there are no residents living or staying at the GQ facility at that time, the FR completes the GQ-level interview to update the GQ information and determines the GQ type, but does not conduct person-level interviews.

The sample of GQ residents is generated from the GQFQ instrument through a systematic sample selection. (See Section C for information about data collection from individuals.) The FR matches the line numbers generated for the person sample to the register of current residents. A grid up to 15 lines long appears on the GQFQ laptop screen, along with a place for name, the sample person location description, the line number corresponding to the register, a telephone number, a telephone extension, and a GQ control number (assigned by the GQFQ sampling program). To complete the sampling process, the FR enters information into the GQFQ that specifically identifies the location of each sample person.

The FR must select an interim or final outcome to record the status of the GQ-level interview, and reasons for GQ refusals or noninterviews are specified. The FR can enter an interim GQ-level interview status reason to allow closure of a case and subsequent reentry. From a list in the GQFQ, the FR selects the appropriate reason for exiting an interview and the GQFQ assigns an outcome code that reflects the current interview status.

There are several reasons why GQ-level data collection may not be completed, such as the FR being unable to locate a facility, finding that there are no residents living or staying at the sample GQ facility during the data collection period, determining that there are now only housing units at the sample GQ facility, or finding that the facility no longer exists.

The FRs ask the GQ contact one reinterview question from the GQ-level GQFQ interview. The purpose of the reinterview question is to detect and deter falsification at the GQ-level.

All information collected during the GQ-level phase is transmitted nightly from each FR to the Census Bureau through secure electronic file transfer.

8.3 PERSON-LEVEL PHASE

This section describes person-level interviews at sample GQ facilities. During this phase, the FR collects data for 10 to 15 sample residents at each assigned GQ facility. The FR prepares person-level survey packages from the GQ-level survey packages assembled at NPC, interviews or distributes survey packages to sampled residents, reviews and edits completed questionnaires, and assigns a final outcome code to all questionnaires and GQ assignments.

Preparation

The NPC is responsible for assembling GQ survey packages and delivering them to the ROs 2 weeks before the start of each survey month. Most of the GQ materials are printed under contract by outside vendors; however, due to the smaller scale of the GQ data collection, forms that are needed only at the GQ level are printed in-house. Trained quality control staff from NPC monitor the work as the contractors print the materials. The NPC rejects batches of work if they do not meet contractual quality standards.

The NPC also is responsible for printing and/or addressing the GQ introductory letters, Survey Package Control List for Special Sworn Status (SSS) Individuals, Instruction Manual for SSS Individuals, listing sheets, and FR folder labels. Contractors print all the questionnaires, the questionnaire information guide booklet, brochures, information card booklet, and Privacy Act notices. The NPC labels ACS GQ sample questionnaires with addresses and control numbers.

On a monthly basis, the Census Bureau headquarters provides label/address files for DocuPrinted materials to the NPC. The NPC receives the files approximately 8 weeks prior to the sample months. On each FR assignment folder, NPC preprints a label containing the GQ name; GQ address, state, city, county, and tract-block; RO name; and GQ type code. Each of the 10 to 15 personal interview survey packages included in the assignment folder contains a GQ questionnaire (preprinted with the previously described folder label information), questionnaire instruction guide, an unlabeled GQ introductory letter, a return envelope, and a supply of FAQ brochures and Privacy Act notices. Other materials the FR may need, such as the SSS form and the instruction manual for SSS individuals, are provided to the FRs by the ROs.

The FR prepares the number of survey packages needed; 10 sample residents are selected at large sample GQ facilities, while all residents are interviewed at GQ facilities identified as small GQs. The FRs use the register information from the GQFQ to prepare the survey packages needed for person-level interviews. The GQFQ also generates a questionnaire control number to track the questionnaires from the beginning of the person-level phase through keying. The GQ questionnaire contains blank lines below the preprinted GQ address where the FR manually records specific information to locate the sample residents (name and floor, wing, room, or bed locations). This information helps the FR to organize the order of personal interviews efficiently, and enables another FR to locate the sampled residents at the GQ facility if a case is reassigned.

Person-Level Survey Materials

This section provides details about the materials needed to conduct ACS GQ person-level interviews.

Introductory Letter for the Sample Resident. The FR gives each sampled person an introductory letter at the time of the person-level interview. It provides information about the ACS, describes why it is important that they complete the GQ questionnaire, describes uses of ACS data, stresses the confidentiality of their individual responses, and includes the Internet address for the ACS Web site.

ACS GQ Questionnaire. The FR uses a paper GQ questionnaire for person-level data collection. This questionnaire is a bilingual, 14-page, two-color, flip-style booklet. Seven blue pages make up the English language GQ questionnaire and, when flipped over, seven green pages make up the Spanish language version. The GQ questionnaire is designed to record detailed population information for one person. It does not include housing questions except for the food stamp benefit question. When a questionnaire is damaged or missing, the FR uses Case Management assignment software to obtain the control number, SP/GQ name, and address information and transcribes this information into the label area of a blank questionnaire, using this new copy for the data collection. A PRCS GQ bilingual questionnaire is used for person-level data collection in Puerto Rico.

GQ Questionnaire Instruction Guide. The FR provides a copy of the questionnaire Instruction Guide to sample residents when a personal interview cannot be conducted, and the resident is completing the questionnaire him/herself. This guide provides respondents with detailed information about how to complete the GQ questionnaire. It explains each question, with expanded instructions and examples, and instructs the respondent on how to mark the check boxes and record write-in responses.

GQ Question and Answer Brochure. When beginning person-level data collection, the FR has a supply of question and answer brochures to give sample residents. This brochure provides answers to questions about the ACS GQ program.

GQ Return Envelopes. The GQ envelopes are used to return completed questionnaires to the FR or GQ contact. These envelopes are not designed for delivery through the U.S. Postal Service.

Completing the GQ Questionnaire

There are several ways for an FR to obtain a completed GQ questionnaire. The preferred method is for the FR to fill out the questionnaire in a face-to-face interview with the sample resident. However, other data collection methods may be necessary. The FR may fill out the questionnaire during a telephone interview with the resident; conduct a face-to-face proxy interview with a relative, guardian, or GQ contact; leave the questionnaire with the resident to complete; or leave the questionnaires with the GQ contact to distribute to sampled residents and collect them when completed. If the questionnaires are left with sample residents to complete, the FR arranges with the resident or GQ contact to return and pick up the completed questionnaire(s) within 2 days. The FR must be certain that sample residents are physically and mentally able to understand and complete the questionnaires on their own.

Before a GQ contact or a GQ employee obtains access to the names of the sample residents and the sample residents' answers to the GQ questionnaire, they must take an oath to maintain the confidential information about GQ residents. By taking this oath, one attains SSS. Generally, an SSS individual is needed when the sample person is not physically or mentally able to answer the questions. An FR must swear in social workers, administrators, or GQ employees under Title 13, United States Code (U.S.C.) if these individuals need to see a sampled resident's responses. In taking the Oath of Nondisclosure, SSS individuals agree to abide by the same rules that apply to other Census Bureau employees regarding safeguarding of Title 13 respondent information and other protected materials, and acknowledge that they are subject to the same penalties for unauthorized disclosure. Legal guardians do not need to be sworn as SSS individuals. If the sample person gives a GQ employee permission to answer questions or help to answer on their behalf, the GQ employee does not need to be sworn in.

Questionnaire Review

After data collection has been completed for each sample resident, the FR conducts separate edit reviews of the person-level questionnaires and of all questionnaires within a GQ-level assignment. The first review is a manual edit check of the responses recorded on each questionnaire. The FR verifies that all responses are legible and that the write-in entries and check boxes contain appropriate responses according to the skip patterns on the questionnaire.

The FR determines whether a person-level interview is complete, a sufficient partial, or incomplete. An interview is considered complete when all or most of the questions have been answered, and a sufficient partial when enough questions have been answered to define the basic characteristics of the sample person. A case is classified as a noninterview when the answers do not meet the criteria of a complete or sufficient partial interview. The FR verifies that the correct outcome code has been assigned to each questionnaire, recording the status of the questionnaire review with an interim or final outcome code.

The FR conducts a GQ-level assignment review after completing the questionnaire review. This review is necessary to ensure that all questionnaires within each GQ assignment are accurately coded and accounted for. The FR determines if all questionnaires for the GQ facility have been completed, or if a return visit will be necessary. The FR marks any unused questionnaires with an "X" and ships both unused and completed questionnaires to the RO on a flow basis throughout each 6-week data collection period. The ROs conduct a final review of the questionnaires prior to sending completed questionnaires to NPC for keying.

8.4 CHECK-IN AND DATA CAPTURE

The RO checks in all questionnaires returned by the FRs. Based on the final outcome code recorded for each questionnaire, the RO separates blank questionnaires from those with data. Only questionnaires that contain data, identified by the outcome code assignment, are shipped each week to NPC for check-in and keying. The forms are sorted according to the sample month and location (United States or Puerto Rico).

Check-In

The NPC check-in staff are given 3 days to check in a form, although they usually check in all the forms they receive within 1 day. The check-in process results in batches of 50 questionnaires for data capture.

NPC accepts completed questionnaires shipped from the RO on a weekly basis, for a period of 6 weeks from the start of the sample month. Each RO closes out the sample month GQ assignments, accounts for all questionnaires, and sends the remaining completed questionnaires to NPC on the last day of the 6-week data collection period. NPC completes the sample month check-in within 7 days of receipt of the final shipment from each RO. Each questionnaire contains a unique bar code that is scanned; this permits forms to be sorted according to monthly sample panel and within each panel, by location. The forms for the United States and Puerto Rico contain slightly different formatting and are keyed in separate batches.

Clerks review each page of every returned ACS GQ questionnaire. They look for correspondence, which they forward to headquarters if necessary. They then scan each bar code to officially check in the form, retain the English or Spanish pages of the questionnaire, and organize the forms into batches of 50 questionnaires.

Data Capture

After the questionnaires have been checked in and batched, they move to the keying unit where the questionnaires are keyed using Key-From-Paper (KFP) technology. NPC clerical staff key the data from the questionnaires and transmit data files to Census Bureau headquarters each night. Final keying of each GQ sample month is scheduled for the last day of the month following the sample month. This schedule allows approximately 2½ weeks to complete all GQ keying after the final delivery of questionnaires for a sample month.

8.5 SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Some exceptions to the data collection procedures are necessary to collect data efficiently from all GQ facilities, such as those in remote geographic locations or those with GQ security requirements.

Biannual Data Collection in Remote Alaska

FRs conduct data collection at sample GQ facilities in Remote Alaska during two separate periods each survey year; they visit a sample of GQ facilities from January through mid-April, and from September through mid-January. This exception is needed because of difficulties in accessing these areas at certain times of the year. The two time periods designated for GQ interviewing are the same as those used for ACS data collection from sample housing units in Remote Alaska. Chapter 7, Section E, provides additional information about data collection in Remote Alaska.

Annual Data Collection Restrictions in Correctional and Military Facilities

Once each survey year, the FRs conduct all data collection at state prisons, local jails, halfway houses, military disciplinary barracks, and correctional institutions. These GQ types, when selected for the sample multiple times throughout the survey year, have each instance of selection clustered into 1 random month for data collection. (The Census Bureau agreed to a Department of Justice request to conduct data collection at each sampled state prison and local jail only once a year.)

When these GQ types are selected for the sample more than once in a year, the FR (or group of FRs) makes one visit and conducts all interviews at the GQ facilities during one randomly assigned month. The GQFQ automatically takes the FR to the person-level sample selection screen for each multiple sample occurrence of the GQ facility.

Survey Period and Security Restrictions in Federal Correctional Facilities

Person-level data collection for the Bureau of Prisons (BoP) operation is during a 4-month period (September through December) for selected federal prisons and detention centers. The BoP provides the Census Bureau with a file containing all federal prisons and detention centers and a full roster list of inmates for each federal facility. The Census Bureau updates the GQ-level information and generates the person-level samples for these GQ facilities.

Prior to the beginning of the BoP operation, the BoP conducts the security clearances of a list of FR names provided to them by the ROs. This process takes 8 to 10 weeks. FRs cannot contact any federal prison or detention center until informed by their RO that all clearances and BoP contact notifications have taken place. The BoP provides the GQ contact names and phone numbers to the ROs prior to the start of data collection. RO staff schedules an appointment with the GQ contact so the FR can make a personal visit to the GQ. Appointments may be scheduled in advance for any time during the federal prison/detention center data collection period, but FRs are not authorized to enter a prison or detention center without an appointment. Each facility has different periods of time when there is limited or no access. The RO contacts the FR after clearance, provides them with the contact information for their BoP assignments, and gives the FR permission to visit the GQ to drop off the questionnaires for the sampled persons. FRs prepare their survey packages before entering the federal prison.

The FR visits the GQ based on the agreed upon appointment and swears in the GQ contact person at the federal facility. The sworn GQ contact person then delivers and collects the completed GQ questionnaires. The contact person mails the completed forms to the RO in a trackable overnight envelope provided by the FR.