

# **U.S. Census Bureau Final Presentation**

By Alison Chen, Mahesh C.R., Jessica Nunez, Vishnu Rajeev, Tiffany Yu

We are a team of five from across Harvard University,  
bringing together diverse perspectives and skills



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HKS/Tuck



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HKS



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Harvard College



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HKS

# The U.S. Census Bureau collects data about people and the economy



**100+** surveys  
conducted regularly



**\$400bn** in  
federal funds allocated  
based on data



Established in the  
**Constitution**, in the  
Department of  
Commerce



Identifies **social**  
and **economic**  
**trends**



Data supports  
**programs** and  
**policies** to help  
communities

# Agenda

- Problem
- Methodology & Insights
- Prototypes
- Strategy & Recommendations

# The Problem

# Meet Augusto

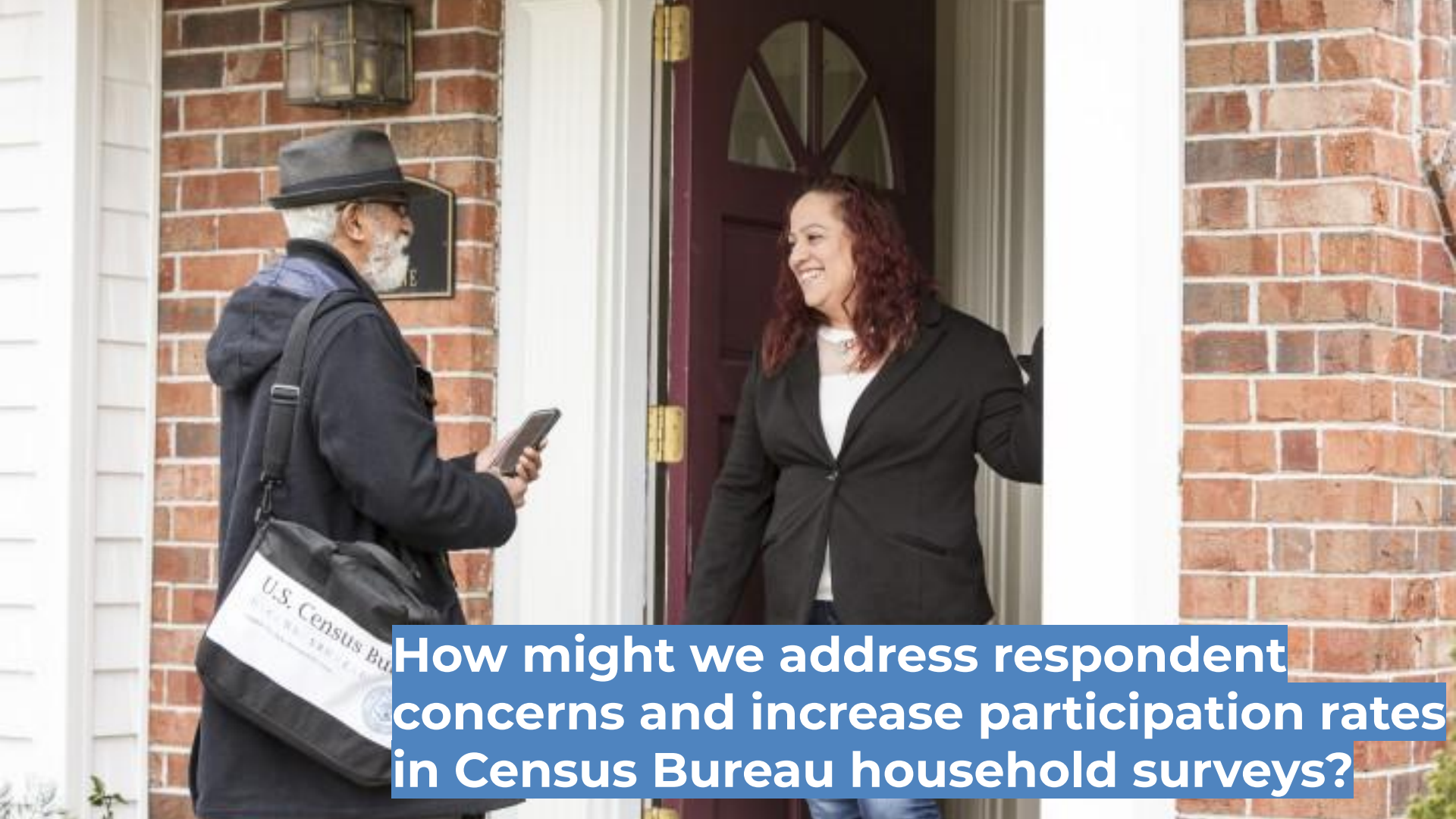
“I am scared of sharing.  
Confidentiality is a problem.”



“When I am answering  
something, I need to  
understand the question and  
what it contributes to.”

**Augusto is 58 years old, works at HKS, and has never been asked to complete a Census Bureau survey.**





**How might we address respondent concerns and increase participation rates in Census Bureau household surveys?**



# Methodology & Insights

# We spoke with experts, stakeholders, and potential respondents to find a solution

6

Expert Interviews

27

User Interviews

100

Prototype ideas

13




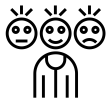

Prototype Iterations

20

User Tests



# Through a coding process, we identified major pain points that affected the respondents

-  **1** **Lack of awareness** of surveys and purpose
-  **2** **Legitimacy** of survey, process, and interviewer
-  **3** Concerns over **data privacy** and **data misuse**
-  **4** **Mood** and competing commitments
-  **5** **Distrust** in government and current politics

# Respondent journey begins much before the actual survey and continues after the survey

## Pre-survey

### Mail

Potential respondents receive a letter in their mailbox that they have been selected for a survey



### Awareness of Census

People get to know about the survey through earlier experiences and other media outreaches

### Ignore or Engage

Respondents either ignore the letter or try to know more by visiting the website/ asking friends etc.



## Survey

### First visit

A field representative usually calls/ visits the respondents at their homes



### Survey

The actual survey lasts between 10 mins to 1 hours depending on the kind of survey



### Decision to participate

The respondent decides whether to participate or not

## Post-survey

### Reflect

Respondents may reflect on the survey and talk about it to their friends and family



### Immediate reaction

Respondents convey their reaction to the field respondent

# Prototypes

The prototyping process was iterative.



# Our prototypes span different stages across the user journey to increase response rate

Pre-survey

Survey

Post-survey

1 BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES



0 SCHOOL CURRICULUM

2 IMPROVED WEBSITE

DECENNIAL CENSUS 3



FOLLOW UP 4



# Prototype 1: The letter needs to be redesigned to help increase respondent engagement

CPS-263(MIS-1)(L) ATLANTA  
(3-2016)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

A Message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau:

Dear Resident,

Your address has been selected to participate in the **Current Population Survey**. This monthly survey is the source of the Nation's unemployment rate that you may hear about in the news. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts this survey in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The Current Population Survey collects information on employment and earnings of people living in the United States. The results help determine federal funding for veteran's programs, youth activities, food assistance and more. The survey results are also used by the Federal Reserve to set interest rates.

**The success of this survey depends on your participation.** We cannot substitute another address for yours. Your address is part of a scientifically selected sample of addresses chosen throughout the country. Your answers represent hundreds of other U.S. households.

Answers to frequently asked questions are on the back of this letter. If you have other questions, please visit [census.gov/cps](http://census.gov/cps), or call your Census Bureau Regional Office at 1-800-424-6974, #53939.

You do not need to take any action at this time. A Census Bureau representative will contact you soon to ask your household to complete the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating in this important survey.



[census.gov](http://census.gov)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Dear community member,

You have been selected.

Here's an important message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau

Your address has been selected to participate in the Current Population Survey. This monthly survey is an important source of the Nation's unemployment rate that you may hear about in the news. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts this survey in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Did you know that without these results, it becomes difficult to determine federal funding for veteran's programs, youth activities, food assistance and more? The survey results are also used by the Federal Reserve to set interest rates.

85% of the people who receive this letter respond to the survey



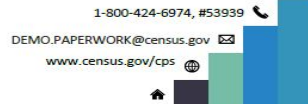
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You do not need to take any action at this time. A Census Bureau representative will contact you soon to ask your household to complete the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating in this important survey.

*(Tear at perforation and keep it for reference. You can reach us on the telephone number, visit our website or email us)*



Pain Points:





# Prototype 1: The letter needs to be redesigned to help increase engagement with the respondent



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20533-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Dear community member,

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1-800-424-6974, #53939  
DEMO.PAPERWORK@census.gov  
www.census.gov/cps

## Goal



To provide information to a potential respondent and nudge the respondent to answer the survey

*"The letter is too long and boring."*

*"I can't see the website nor a phone number to call on?"*

*"I don't even read it and trash it."*

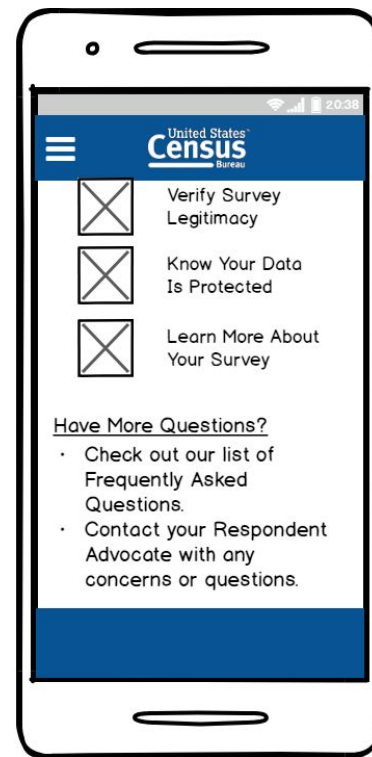
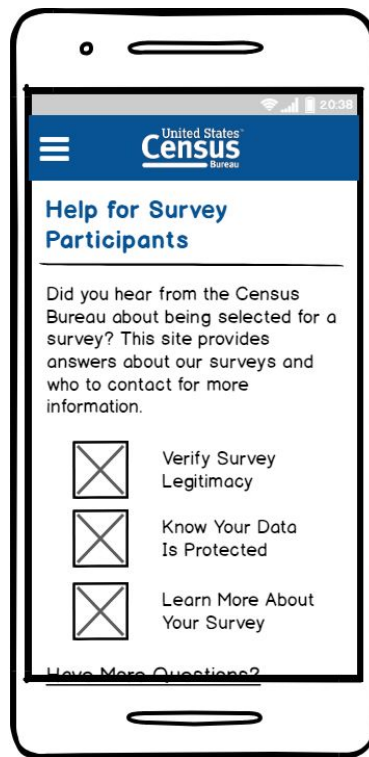
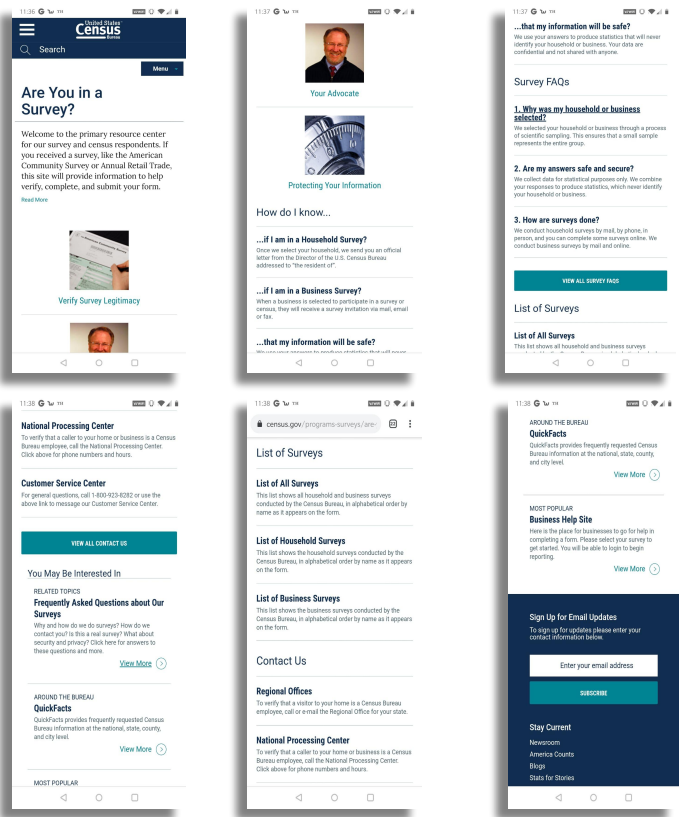
## Findings

- Redesign the letter to catch the attention of the respondent.
- Use behavioral science techniques

Pain Points:



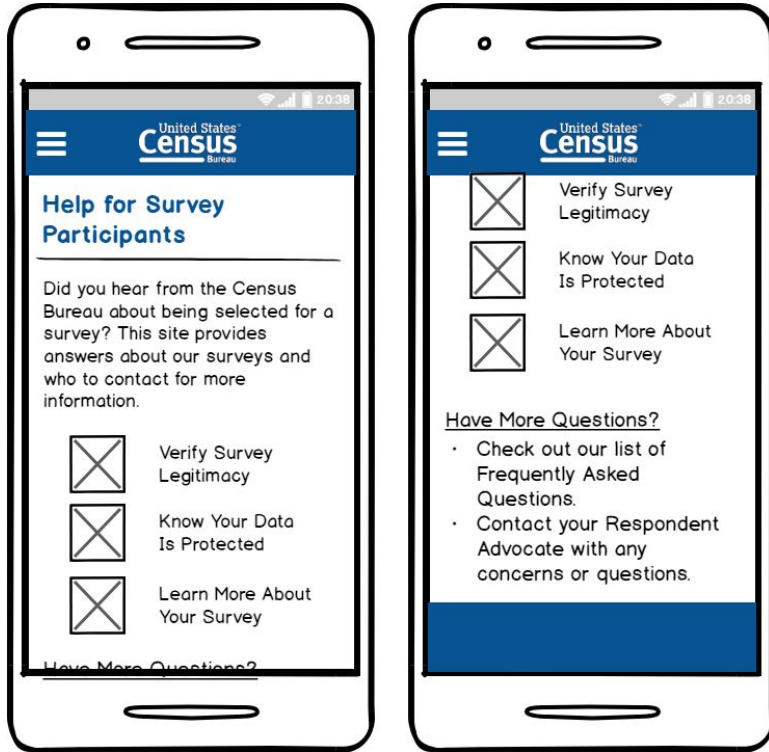
# Prototype 2: The current support webpage has information overload that confuses the user



Pain Points:



# Prototype 2: The online page that provides support for respondents needs redesign in mobile and website



## Goal

To redesign the webpage which provides help for respondents

*"I loved how this new design helps me exactly what I would want to know."*

*"The new mobile design easy to navigate. The original version is so long to read all of that."*



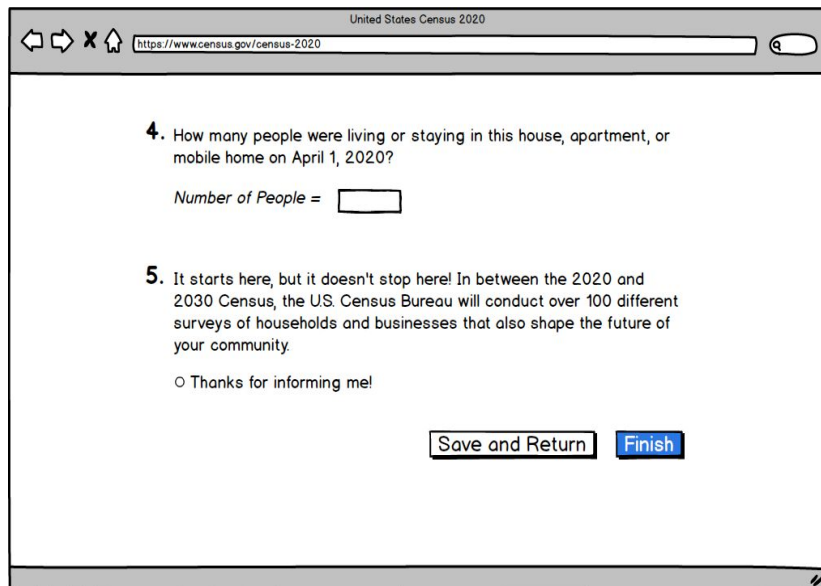
## Findings

- Remove information overload and provide concise text
- Self-navigable template

Pain Points:



# Prototype 3: A message at the end of the decennial census can improve awareness of other surveys



United States Census 2020  
https://www.census.gov/census-2020

4. How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2020?

Number of People =

5. It starts here, but it doesn't stop here! In between the 2020 and 2030 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau will conduct over 100 different surveys of households and businesses that also shape the future of your community.

Thanks for informing me!



## Goal

To increase awareness of household surveys by adding a note in the 2020 census.

*"I don't want extra solicitations, I don't check my mail, and if my email inbox gets flooded..."*

*"I would do a survey if it could shape the future of my community."*



## Findings

- Informative but unclear effect on response rate
- Concern about possible solicitations

Pain Points:



# Prototype 4: Follow up after surveys to show people the impact of their response

**United States Census Bureau**

You have helped create the following:

### How Ready Are We?

Natural Disaster or Emergency Preparedness

To better understand the needs of first responders and other emergency workers, the 2017 American Housing Survey asks U.S. residents how prepared they are for disasters.

Item	Percentage
Emergency Water Supply: At least three gallons or 24 bottles of water for each person in the household.	58.6%
Nonpotable Emergency Food: Household has enough nonperishable food to sustain everyone in the household for 3 days.	11.3%

April 5, 2019


Joe,

Your voice matters. Thank you.

The American Housing Survey collects up-to-date information on housing quality and housing costs. Your help enables federal, state, and local governments to create programs that aid the housing needs of people of all income levels, ages, and minority groups.

Your voice will be heard in Washington, D.C. and your cooperation provides a distinct service to our country. Your answers not only represent your household but thousands of others like yours. Thank you for making a difference.

To learn more, visit [census.gov/visual](https://census.gov/visual) or scan the QR code.



Janet Williams  
Field Respondent  
The United States  
Census Bureau



## Goal

Let people know what happens with their survey responses to motivate future engagement.

*"I would definitely feel more inclined to fill out another survey because I know my voice is actually being heard."*



## Findings

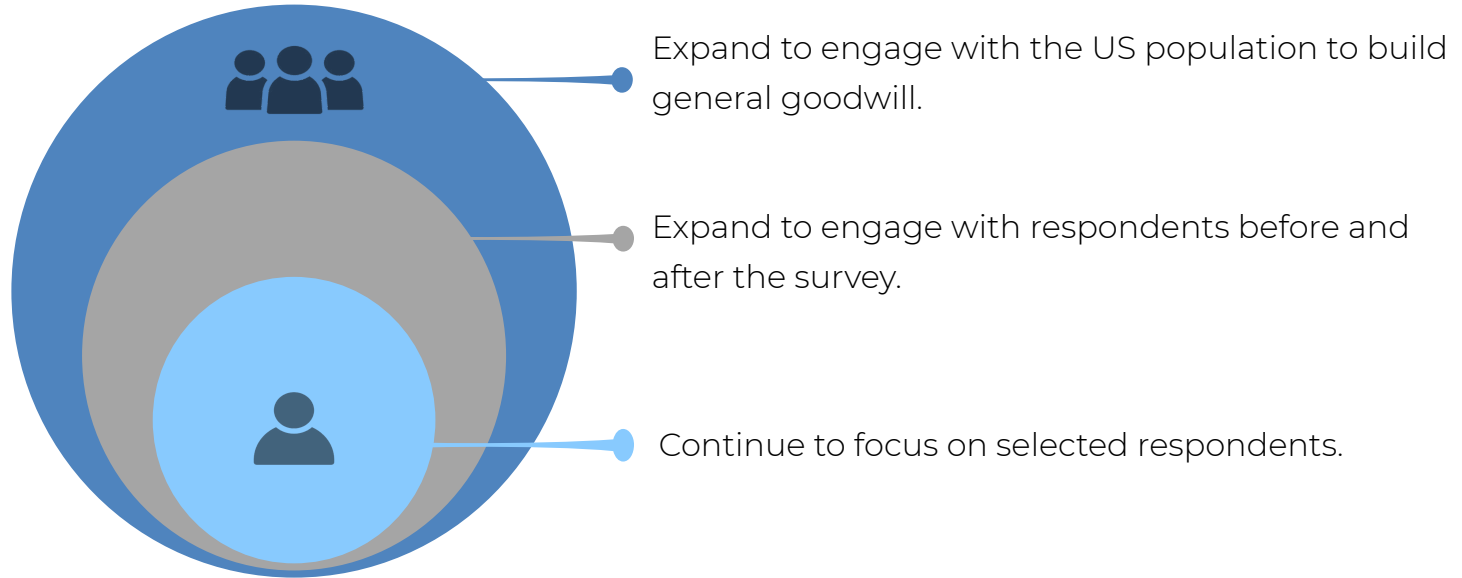
- Use concise, specific text that shows impact of contribution
- Preferred medium depends on individual

Pain Points:



# Strategy & Recommendations

# Strategically, the US Census Bureau should adopt a holistic respondent engagement process



# Recommendations to execute the strategy include five action steps that span varying implementation periods



## **Market Education Curriculum**

Reach out to schools and other organizations to raise awareness of Statistics in Schools curriculum.



## **Implement Behavioral Science Nudges**

Add and highlight specific motivating language to introductory letters and other survey communication.



## **Follow Up with Purpose**

Let people know how their response makes an impact by providing personal follow-up information.



## **Improve Website Design**

Make it easy for respondents to find answers to their questions with simple layouts on desktop *and* mobile.



## **Leverage Decennial Messaging**

Take advantage of the wide reach of the decennial census to increase awareness of other surveys.



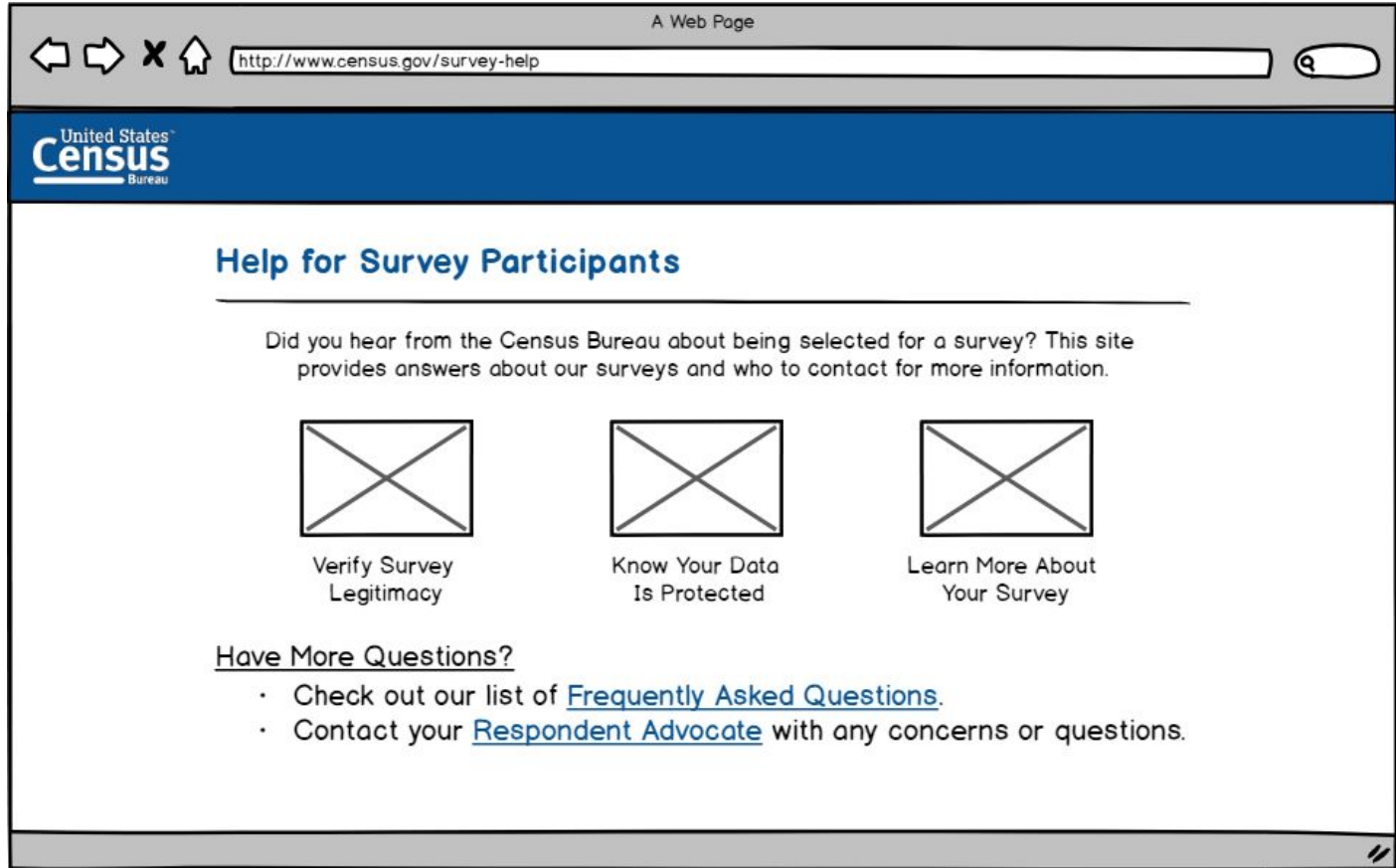


# Appendix

# Appendix 1: Behavioral Nudges Used

- Use the following behavioral science techniques to nudge the respondents to answer the survey:
  - **Social norms:** The propensity to respond to a survey increases when we know others are doing it
  - **Loss framing:** Indicate what happens if they do not respond to the survey
  - **Vividness:** Highlight aspects of the message that is critical
  - **Plan making:** Allows for an additional step to tear part of the letter - that makes the respondent remember the survey

# Appendix 2: Redesigned Webpage



# Appendix 3: Text Message Follow-Up

