Guide for Investigators

The American Panel Survey

Weidenbaum Center
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About *The American Panel Survey* (TAPS)

TAPS is a monthly online survey of a national probability sample of about 2,000 adults in the United States. A variety of social science investigators use the panel. Most studies concern the economic and political attitudes and behavior of the American public.

The panel was recruited in May-July, 2011, using an address-based sampling (ABS) frame. That is, from a random selection of residential addresses, stratified using ancillary data on age and ethnic group, a panel of 2,000 was recruited. TAPS surveys are administered online; selected panelists who do not have a computer or on-line service are provided access by TAPS.

TAPS surveys are conducted for the Weidenbaum Center by Knowledge Networks, a leading online survey research firm located in Palo Alto, California.

The panel results in a minimum of 1,550 completed interviews per month.

Instrument Design

The directors of TAPS, in consultation with other scholars, have established a battery of demographic and other questions that are asked of all panelists. In addition, a large set of recurring questions is asked about economic and political subjects. The schedule for recurring questions—some monthly, some less frequently—is provided in the Recurring Questions section below.
In addition to recurring questions, research modules of up to 15 minutes may be placed on each month's survey. TAPS directors work with investigators to schedule research modules taking into account research needs and the necessity of maintaining the panel.

Prices (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012)

Base Fees. The base prices for a research module are based on significant fixed costs and additional costs associated with the length of the survey. Fixed costs included the recruitment and maintenance of the panel, staffing costs at Knowledge Networks and the Weidenbaum Center, the accumulation of background data on panelists, participation incentives for panelists, use of the mail and telephone to prompt panelists, and data management. The length of survey affects programming and staff time, data and codebook preparation, and the limited resource of access to panelists.

Fee Schedule, July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012	
Survey Length	**Fee**
5 minutes or less	$49,333.00
10 minutes	61,667.00
15 minutes	74,000.00
20 minutes	86,333.00

Fees for surveys of other lengths are prorated according to these fees.

Base fees include the following deliverables: Data in a standard format (STATA, SPSS, Excel), a codebook in Word, weights, and documentation on sample details.

Background Data. The base fees include up to 15 variables of demographic and other variables (value of approximately $12,000). TAPS has data on all 15 variables for nearly all panelists. The selection of background variables is listed in Background Variables below.

Data from Previous Surveys. Responses to questions asked in previous surveys are available when the data are not committed to other investigators. TAPS cannot guarantee that data are available for all panelists on all questions. The price per question is $750.

Panel Designs. TAPS has a panel design that should be exploited by investigators. The base prices apply to both cross-sectional and panel designs. For example, a five-minute battery of questions that is repeated at four different times is a 20-minute survey.

Special Fees. TAPS directors work with investigators to establish prices for projects that require special programming or other staff support, such as projects that involve streaming media.

Pre-Proposals and Proposals for Research Modules

Investigators should submit pre-proposals for research modules to the TAPS directors as early as possible but no later than 6 months before they hope to be in the field.

A pre-proposal should be 3-4 single spaced pages and include (a) a statement of the importance of the work, (b) the major hypotheses, (c) a discussion of the number and type of questions that are expected to be used, and (d) a proposed date for the survey(s).

A successful pre-proposal review will result in a request for a longer proposal that includes a draft questionnaire.

Research modules will be scheduled to account for several considerations: The purposes of the research, other TAPS research modules and priorities, and panel maintenance.

Investigators' Responsibilities

Each investigator is responsible for the following steps in the research process—

1. successful completion of the IRB process required by a funding agency or home university at least one month before the scheduled survey (documentation must be provided);

2. delivery of a draft questionnaire to TAPS directors at least six weeks before the scheduled survey;

3. analysis of pre-test data;

4. revision of the questionnaire and approval of TAPS directors at least four weeks before the scheduled survey;

5. half payment of the fees at least two weeks before the scheduled survey;

6. full payment of the fees within one month following delivery of data and codebook.

Sampling Methodology and Recruitment

The sample of addresses is drawn from the U.S. Postal Service's computerized delivery sequence file (CDSF). The CDSF covers some 97% of the physical addresses in all 50 states including P.O. boxes and rural route addresses. Homes that are vacant or seasonal are identified as are other categories that help to refine the efficiency of the sample to be mailed. Using data from available U.S. Census files plus from a variety of commercial data bases, such as White Pages, Experian, Acxiom, etc., MSG can add names to these addresses, match with landline telephone numbers, and—with some level of accuracy—tag on information regarding race/ethnicity, age of householder, whether there are people of a certain age in the household, presence of children, home ownership status, etc.

Based on recent experience with the recruitment of an online panel with the ABS frame, TAPS strata are designed to specifically break out young adults (ages 18-24) and Hispanics, in addition to the balance of the population. Young adults and Hispanics may be strategically oversampled because these groups have a tendency to under-respond to surveys. Four mutually exclusive strata are used:

1. 18-24 year-old Hispanic adults
2. All other Hispanic adults ages 25+ or age unknown
3. 18-24 year-old non-Hispanic adults
4. All other adults that are non-Hispanic or ethnicity unknown and ages 25+ or age unknown

The estimated yield from each of the above strata is **5.6%, 6.4%, 14.4% and 9.4**%, respectively [actual yields to be updated in September].

Within-household selection procedures vary by the mode in which the household responds to the initial contact. Details are available upon request.

A successful recruitment is counted only when a Profile Survey is completed.

The resulting sample design and expected outcome is as follows [to be updated in September]:

	Stratum	A. Mailing		B. Yields		C. Profiled		D. Strata Distributions	
		count	distribution	proportion	count	proportion	count	sample	frame
1	Hispanic 18-24	333	1.0%	0.056	19	0.65	12	0.6%	0.2%
2	Hispanic 25+/unk	6,943	19.9%	0.064	445	0.65	289	14.4%	14.1%
3	Other 18-24	469	1.3%	0.144	68	0.65	44	2.2%	0.7%
4	All Else 25+/unk	27,071	77.8%	0.094	2,550	0.65	1,657	82.8%	85.0%
	Overall	**34,816**			**3,081**		**2,003**	100.0%	100.0%

TAPS will recruit additional sample in later years to maintain the panel size of 2,000 U.S. adult English-speaking members as some members leave the panel. Replacement recruiting will be conducted using the same methods as the original panel. A schedule for replacement recruiting is available upon request.

Sample Features

A panel of about 2,000 English-speaking adults in the U.S. has been created.

We estimate that approximately 80% of the TAPS Panel (1,600) will complete each TAPS wave during the first year and 75% will complete each survey in the second and subsequent years.

TAPS will provide a minimum of 1,550 completes per wave with a minimum of three weeks in the field.

The TAPS Panel is closely matched to the CPS estimates of the American population on key demographic characteristics, as show in the table below.

Recurring Questions

[to be updated in June]

Schedule of Recurring Questions			
Monthly	Every two months	Every Six Months	Once a Year
job approval for key national political actors	most impt problem Qs	party id	battery of issue Qs
household and country economic evaluations	presidential candidate preferences in election year	ideological id	political/economic knowledge
household spending and saving expectations	reelect?	favorability measure (parties, institutions, candidates)	political participation
happiness	plan to vote		political process Qs: filibuster, veto
	generic congressional vote		tolerance
			institutional legitimacy
			media use
			campaign exposure

Weighting

TAPS calculates weights to make survey results generalizable to the U.S. population of English-speaking adults. Investigators will receive these weights as variables in delivered data files.

Adjustments are made to compensate for (a) selection probabilities altered by the stratified sample design and (b) within household selection probabilities associated with the random choice of a panel member from among all eligible adults residing in the household. These adjustments constitute the base weight that corrects the sample to approximate a simple random sample of the population of adults.

The following weight, $w1_{i/k}$, for mailing addresses i within stratum k is calculated as follows:

$$w1_{i/k} = (P_{i/k} / P_{tot})(S_{tot} / S_{i/k})$$

> where
>
> $P_{i/k}$ is the population or frame count within stratum k,
>
> P_{tot} is the total population count from the frame,
>
> $S_{i/k}$ is the sample count within stratum k, and
>
> S_{tot} is the total recruited sample size.

We also adjust for the selection probability of the randomly selected adult within households. To adjust for this, we weight each selected respondent, r, by the inverse of the number of eligible adults, A, ages 18 and older, enumerated as residing in household, h, and call this $w2_{r/h}$ and calculate as follows:

$$w2_{r/h} = A_h / 1$$

The base weight is the product of $w1_{i/k}$ and $w2_{r/h}$.[1]

TAPS directors can provide an estimate of design effects upon request. Investigators may choose to use the estimated design effect to adjust standard errors in statistical estimates.

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[1] An additional adjustment will be made for our follow-up efforts to recruit panelists by telephone after an initial nonresponse. Households recruited based on the telephone follow-up may over-represent addresses in the sample with a successful telephone match. Based on the natural match rate in the sample, recruited households from the telephone recruitment will be weighted downward appropriately.

Background Variables [to be updated in June]

1. age
2. sex
3. race/ethnicity
4. marital status
5. religion
6. religious service attendance
7. education
8. employed
9. occupation
10. citizenship
11. household income
12. personal income
13. home ownership
14. ideological self identification
15. party identification

IRB Review

The Washington University IRB process has been completed for core features of TAPS. TAPS is given an "exempt" status as a survey project on which the identifiers are not provided to TAPS directors or investigators and proper protocols to acquire informed consent and preserve confidentiality are in place.

Upon request, TAPS directors can provide information that may be useful to investigators who must complete IRB review for funding agencies and home universities.