

CALL FOR PROPOSALS TO ADD QUESTIONS TO THE 2010 GSS

The General Social Survey (GSS) project invites researchers and research groups in the user community to propose individual items or multi-item topical modules for inclusion in its 2010 survey. Proposals submitted in response to this call need not be accompanied by funding to support costs of data collection and data processing. The GSS PIs and Board of Overseers will select proposals based primarily on their scientific merit and potential contributions to the GSS project.

The GSS is a nationally representative survey of non-institutionalized adults in the United States, conducted primarily via face-to-face interviews. A National Science Foundation (NSF) grant provides foundational support for the GSS, and for inclusion of items submitted in response to this call; other sources provide supplementary support, typically for the costs of fielding topical modules. GSS data are collected every two years, and made available to the research community and the public as soon as possible after data collection is complete. Until 2004, the GSS was designed as a repeated cross-sectional survey. Beginning in 2006, a panel component was added to the GSS design. Through the use of appropriate sampling weights, however, each biennial GSS will provide nationally representative estimates of distributions of survey items measuring a wide variety of social and political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of U.S. adults. For additional information about the GSS and its study design, please consult the official NORC/GSS website at <http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/>.

Beginning in 2010, the NSF-funded component of the GSS project budget will support costs of collecting data for some user-contributed survey items. (This represents a departure from GSS practice for the 1998-2006 period, during which proposals to add topical modules could be considered only if they were covered by funding from other sources. Such outside-funded proposals remain welcome, and investigators interested in initiating proposals for outside-funded items should contact Tom W. Smith, the Principal Investigator and Director of the GSS at NORC (smitht@norc.uchicago.edu; phone 773-256-6288).) This call describes the criteria for user-contributed proposals to be supported by GSS project funds, and the process through which decisions will be reached concerning them.

Proposals for New Content

User-initiated proposals submitted in response to this call may advocate inclusion of supplementary GSS content that varies in length, from as little as a single survey question to as much as a topical module of interrelated questions that might require five minutes of interview time. Proposals should articulate the scientific objectives that would be met if the proposed items were to be added to the GSS and the specific research questions that the proposer would seek to address using them. Ideally, proposals will include the specific wording of survey items, evidence of their past use and performance in other surveys, and evidence bearing on the quality of data (validity, reliability, item nonresponse, etc.) they elicit. In some cases, however, users may be able only to suggest a general topic area and examples of the topics and types of items that are of interest. Demonstrating that items have proved fruitful in past published work, or that their inclusion would contribute to better understanding in key social science domains, can strengthen all proposals. Items that have synergies with existing GSS content, or that promise to be of interest to a large number of GSS users, will be of interest.

Users are encouraged to think broadly and flexibly when considering what kinds of items to propose. They may, for example, propose to collect data from some subset of GSS respondents (e.g.

employed persons, currently married persons, or persons who have attended religious services in the past year). Proposals for survey experiments that administer alternative question wordings to randomly designated subsets of respondents are also welcome; such experiments may address substantive social science questions, issues of survey methodology, or both. Statistical power considerations are relevant, in that items could be administered to all GSS respondents or to some randomly drawn subsample of a given size. Proposals therefore should consider how large a sample an investigator requires in order to address the research questions of interest.

Proposals may suggest that items be added to the 2010 GSS as a one-time topical module administered to a nationally representative cross-section of US adults, as most GSS topical modules have been. The 2010 GSS will collect baseline data for a three-wave panel study (with followup interviews in the 2012 and 2014 GSSs), however, so proposals for adding repeated content will also be entertained in response to this call. Investigators proposing panel content should address the value of having data on within-individual change on the proposed items. Because such proposals would involve interview time on three successive GSSs, it is anticipated that successful proposals for repeated/panel content will be shorter (i.e., will involve fewer survey items) than those for one-time inclusion of items.

Generally, questions on the GSS are fixed-choice survey items that are asked in a face-to-face context. Other formats are also possible (e.g., self-administered items, open-ended items, card sort tasks, or stimulus materials provided via audio or video) but such variations often increase time, complexity and cost (coding costs are substantial for open-ended items, for example). Hence, items with such formats must serve an important scientific purpose to justify the additional effort required; proposals to add such items should address this consideration.

Criteria for Choosing Content

The GSS attempts to provide high quality data in a timely manner to a large and broad social science user community. Proposals to add content will be evaluated with this objective in mind by the GSS Board of Overseers and the principal investigators of the GSS.

The Board and PIs will refer to the following criteria in developing and encouraging new content for the GSS:

1. Above all, new content must be of high scientific quality, appropriate to the GSS, and justified on substantive, theoretical or methodological grounds.
2. New content must be useful to a wide range of users (e.g., researchers, teachers, policymakers, etc.) that extends beyond the investigator(s) setting forth a proposal. New content ideally will enhance the understanding and/or usefulness of GSS items in the replicating core, GSS data previously collected as part of a topical module, or data from other sources (e.g., to be used for comparisons).
3. A primary mission of the GSS is to monitor social change in the United States over time through replication of survey items. Items that contribute to this mission because they have previously been administered in nationally representative studies of US adults (including past GSSs) will be of interest.
4. Similarly, the GSS seeks to understand the US by comparison with other world societies. Proposals to compare and contrast the US with other societies through including items that have been administered in recent nationally representative studies conducted in other societies will be of interest.

5. New content must meet human subjects protections, in compliance with the GSS project's IRB approval, NSF and NORC policies. Investigators should determine whether they must also obtain IRB approval at their own institutions.
6. New content must fit within the overall time framework of the survey and must not interfere with respondent cooperation and the integrity of responses to questions later in the survey.

Time Line for Proposals and Development of Items

Significant lead time is required before new material can be included on a GSS survey. To be considered for inclusion in the 2010 GSS, investigators should submit proposals to Tom W. Smith, the Principal Investigator and Director of the GSS at NORC (smitht@norc.uchicago.edu; phone 773-256-6288) no later than **October 1, 2008**. Interested researchers are encouraged, but not required, to consult with Dr. Smith prior to submitting a formal proposal.

Proposals submitted in response to this call will be considered by the GSS Board at its mid-fall, 2008 meeting. At that meeting, some proposals will be selected for further development, which will entail the exchange of advice and ideas among the Board, the GSS PIs, and the proposer(s), informed by both cognitive and conventional pretesting of items by NORC. The Board will review the status of the selected proposals at its spring, 2009 meeting; by this time it will be essential that proposals specify the provisional question wording for all prospective items (if one was not available in the first instance). The Board and PIs will select some sets of items for inclusion in a conventional pretest that will be conducted in the summer of 2009, to establish (among many other things) the actual interview time requirements of the proposed items. At its fall, 2009 meeting, the Board will make a final determination as to the sets of items that will be included in the 2010 GSS.

It is important that researchers proposing items understand that inclusion of their items cannot be assured until those items have undergone the full cycle of development described above, and until the GSS Board has selected them for inclusion in the GSS at its fall, 2009 meeting. Space on GSS interview schedules is always limited. The Board and PIs may require that the wording of proposed survey items be changed, based on pretest evidence or other considerations, though such changes will be made in consultation with proposers. Likewise, due to the scarcity of interview time, the Board and PIs may elect to include only a subset of the items proposed about a given topic. Data collected will be made publicly available to all GSS users along with the rest of the 2010 GSS, roughly six months after 2010 data collection is complete.

At this time the GSS is unable to specify precisely how much 2010 interview time will be available to accommodate items proposed in response to this call. The available time will depend on the amount of NSF funding made available for this purpose, decisions about which are currently pending. The project is confident that the budget will be sufficient to accommodate some of the items and modules proposed in response to this call, however.

[Investigators who have obtained, or might wish to seek, outside funding for their items should consult the document "Guidelines for Paid Supplements to the GSS" available on the GSS website at <http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/>). Such proposals are considered as part of a separate, but parallel, process.]

Proposal Length and Format

Proposals submitted in response to this call should be roughly 2-5 pages in length, and should address the following points:

1. The background and the scientific, theoretical, or methodological motivation for inclusion of the topic in the GSS. Proposals for repeated/panel content should address the gains to be realized by obtaining data on within-individual change on the subject;
2. The specific topics, and ideally the specific items or questions, that would be included in the GSS, together with any evidence of the quality of the data they elicit;
3. Previous usage of the proposed items, or items on similar topics, in the GSS or other surveys;
4. The appropriateness of the GSS for the proposed items, and any synergies they may involve with GSS project objectives or existing GSS items.

The Board and PIs will review and discuss proposals, and notify proposers after the fall, 2008 Board meeting as to whether or not their proposals were selected for further development. At that point, the Board and PIs may request that proposers provide additional information. The review process will not provide a detailed written assessment of unsuccessful proposals.

To reiterate, proposals responding to this call should be submitted to Tom W. Smith at NORC (smitht@norc.uchicago.edu) no later than *October 1, 2008*.