

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS TO ADD QUESTIONS TO THE 2016 GSS

**Summary.** The General Social Survey invites proposals to add questions to its anticipated 2016 survey. Proposals will be accepted on the basis of scientific quality and scholarly interest. Outside funding is not necessary. The deadline for submissions is March 15, 2014.

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Pending the renewal of support and availability of sufficient funds, the General Social Survey (GSS) project expects to include some items or topical modules designed by users in its 2016 survey, and invites users to submit proposals recommending such items or modules. Proposals submitted in response to this call need not be accompanied by funding that would support costs of data collection and data processing. They will be judged with their scientific merit as a primary consideration.

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) award provides foundational support for the GSS, and if renewed would support inclusion of items submitted in response to this call; other sources provide supplementary support, typically to field 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, the GSS design added a panel component for several rounds. Through the use of appropriate sampling weights, each biennial GSS provides 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 award that funds the core GSS survey supported data collection costs for some user-contributed survey items. (This departs from GSS practice for the 1998-2006 period, during which proposed topical modules could be considered only if accompanied 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](mailto:smitht@norc.uchicago.edu); phone 773-256-6288).) This call describes the criteria for user-contributed proposals and the process through which decisions will be reached concerning them.

### Proposals for New Content

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 5 minutes or more of interview time. Proposals should articulate the specific research issues that the proposer would address and the scientific objectives that would be met if the proposed items were added to the GSS. Ideally,

proposals will include the specific wording of survey items, document their past use and performance in other surveys, and present evidence bearing on the quality of data (validity, reliability, item nonresponse, etc.) they elicit. Also, conducting a pretest of the proposed items is recommended. Demonstrating that items have proved fruitful in past published work, or that their inclusion would contribute to better understanding in key social science fields or interdisciplinary domains, can strengthen proposals. In some cases, however, users may be able only to suggest a general topic area and give examples of topics and types of items. Items that have synergies with existing GSS content, or that promise to interest 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, since items can be measured for all GSS respondents or for some randomly drawn subsample of them. Proposals therefore should consider how large a sample is required to draw conclusions.

Proposals may suggest that items be added to the 2016 GSS as a one-time topical module administered to a nationally representative cross-section of US adults; most GSS topical modules have taken this form. At this point, the specific design of the 2016 is not known; it is possible, however, that it will collect baseline data for a three-wave panel study (with anticipated follow-up interviews in the 2018 and 2020 GSSs), so proposals for adding repeated content will also be entertained. However, inclusion of such a panel is far from certain. Investigators who propose panel content should address the value of having data on within-individual change on items they propose. 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.

Proposers should be aware that NSF funding for the GSS project currently extends only through the 2014 survey. Successful proposals for items or modules submitted in response to this call will appear in the GSS only if sufficient funds to conduct its 2016 round are awarded. Any proposal involving repeated content would be accepted pending renewal funding of the project into 2018 and beyond.

The rotating panel design of the GSS initiated in 2006 means that each GSS round now collects data for a freshly-sampled cross-sectional sample, while simultaneously reinterviewing respondents from previous cross-sections. The reinterviews contain much of the interview time available to accommodate new content. For this logistical reason, much new content in 2016 would be administered to GSS respondents who were first interviewed in the previous round (2014), rather than to respondents newly sampled in 2016. Items in successful proposals received in response to this call therefore may appear as part of a 2016 reinterview with respondents to the 2014 GSS. Investigators may need to make use of weights that adjust for between-wave attrition in order to obtain appropriate estimates based on their 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 interview and development 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 in order to justify the additional effort required; proposals to add items using such formats should address this consideration.

### Criteria for Choosing Content

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

The Board and PIs will use the following criteria in selecting and developing 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 ([http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gss/Documents/Codebook/Replicating%20Core\\_0707.pdf](http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gss/Documents/Codebook/Replicating%20Core_0707.pdf)), 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 study 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 for this reason.
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 by including items that have been administered in recent nationally representative studies conducted in other societies will be of interest for this reason.
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/or 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 2016 GSS, investigators should submit proposals to Tom W. Smith, the Principal Investigator and Director of the GSS at NORC ([smitht@norc.uchicago.edu](mailto:smitht@norc.uchicago.edu); phone 773-256-6288) no later than *March 15, 2014*.

Proposals submitted in response to this call will be reviewed by the GSS Board at its spring, 2014 meeting. At that meeting, some proposals will be selected for subsequent development, which will entail the exchange of advice and ideas between the Board, the GSS PIs, and the proposer(s), informed by both cognitive and conventional pretesting of items by NORC; such development may extend into 2015. The Board will review the status of the selected proposals at its fall, 2014 meeting; by then it will be essential that proposals specify the provisional question wording for all prospective items (if the wording was not available in the first instance). The Board and PIs will select some sets of items for inclusion in a conventional pretest that would be conducted in the summer of 2015, which will establish (among many other things) the actual interview time requirements of the proposed items. At its fall, 2015 meeting, the Board will make a final determination of the items to be included in the 2016 GSS.

It is important that investigators understand that inclusion of items in the GSS is not assured until they have undergone the full cycle of development described above, and until the GSS Board has decided to include them in the GSS at its fall, 2015 meeting. Space on GSS interview schedules is always limited. The Board and PIs may require changes in the wording of proposed survey items 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 suggested in any given proposal. After data are collected, they will be made publicly available to all GSS users along with the rest of the 2016 GSS, roughly six months after 2016 data collection is complete: proposers will not have exclusive access to data collected using their items for any period of time.

At this point the GSS is unable to specify precisely how much 2016 interview time will be available to accommodate items proposed in response to this call. It can say that numerous proposals for items and modules of the kind described here were successful in adding content to the 2010-2014 GSSs.

[Investigators who have obtained, or might wish to seek, outside funding for their items should consult the document “Guidelines for Prospective GSS Module Proposals” available on the GSS website: see <http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gss/Documents/Codebook/gssguidelines.pdf>). Such proposals will be 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 survey items or questions, that would be included in the GSS, together with any evidence of the quality of the data they elicit;
3. Previous knowledge about the appearance of the items, or items on similar topics, in the GSS or other surveys, and their use in published research;
4. The appropriateness of the GSS for the proposed items, to include any synergies they may involve with GSS project objectives or existing GSS items; and
5. Proposals for questions about multiple topics should indicate the priority assigned to measuring the different topics in the GSS. Likewise, proposals to measure a given topic using multiple items should indicate which items have higher and lower priority for inclusion.

Proposals from groups of investigators as well as individual investigators are welcome.

When similar calls for proposals were issued in 2010, 2012, and 2014, the GSS received many more proposals for new content than it could accommodate. The Board and PIs will review and discuss proposals submitted in response to this call, and then notify investigators as to whether or not their proposals were selected for further development. At that point, the Board and PIs may request that investigators provide additional information, and may suggest that separate groups of proposers with interest in similar topics collaborate as part of working groups to develop a topical module. The Board will provide investigators who submit unsuccessful proposals with brief summaries of reasons that their proposals were not selected, but cannot offer detailed critiques.

To reiterate, proposals responding to this call should be submitted to Tom W. Smith at NORC ([smitht@norc.uchicago.edu](mailto:smitht@norc.uchicago.edu)) no later than *March 15, 2014*.