
Consumer Expenditure Survey CNSTAT Panel Briefing

Survey Design & Data Collection

Adam Safir

Division of Consumer Expenditure Survey, BLS

February 8, 2011



Outline

- Survey Design
 - Interview Survey
 - Diary Survey
- Data Collection
 - Role of the Census Bureau
 - Interviewing
 - Response Rates

Interview Survey

- Designed to collect expenditures for large or less frequently purchased items that can be recalled in a quarterly interview, or things that Rs make regular monthly payments on
- Housing units are selected for sample; Consumer units are identified within housing units
- Each unit is interviewed 5 times
- Rotating panel design to smooth workflow

Interview Survey, cntd.

- Instrument:
 - Paper and pencil survey until 2003
 - Converted to Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) in 2003
- Mode:
 - Primarily personal visit, but some decentralized telephone collection (~33%)
- Interview Length:
 - 60-minute average

Interview 1

- Establish reference person and HH roster
- Identify consumer units (CUs):
 - Anyone related to reference person by blood, marriage, unmarried partner, other legal arrangement
 - Other individuals or groups of related individuals may form additional CUs
 - Others who share spending on housing, food and other expenses

Interview 1: Consumer Units

- Composition may change over time
- Can move in or out of housing unit
- Students living away-from-home, in student housing, are separate Cus

Interview 1: Data Collected

- Demographic information for each CU member
- Housing characteristics:
 - e.g., type of structure, number of rooms, fuels used, year built, etc.
- Inventory of appliances and equipment:
 - e.g., stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, computer, etc.
- Expenditures:
 - One month recall for all expenditure categories
 - Used for bounding purposes

Interview 1: Data Collected, contd.

- Detailed information on:
 - Owned Properties - description, current value, existing mortgages, home equity loans, payments
 - Vehicles – year, make, model, financing info for owned/leased
 - Health insurance – insurer, type, who pays
 - Non-health insurance – type (e.g., life, property, auto), pymt schedule
- Data are carried forward to Interview 2-5, and updated for disposals and new purchases

Interviews 2-5

- Updates to inventoried items:
 - Properties, vehicles, insurance, etc.
- Expenditures, descriptions, and other information for the previous 3 months for most expenditure categories

Interviews 2-5: Expenditure Categories

Categories	
Rent	Household services
Utilities	Educational expenses
Home maintenance & repairs	Child care
Major appliances	Trips and vacations
Minor appliances	Transportation
Clothing	Entertainment
Household furnishings	Cash contributions
Medical expenses	

Interviews 2-5: Expense Patterns for Other Items (detail collected in diary)

- Usual weekly expenses for groceries
- Usual monthly expense for:
 - alcoholic beverages
 - mass transit to go to work, school, and other places

Interviews 2 & 5

- Work experience and income for each CU member 14+
- Income for the CU as a whole
- Credit liability
- Interview 5
 - Change in assets

Diary Survey

- Designed to collect detailed data on small frequently purchased items which may be difficult to recall in a quarterly interview
- Daily diary, with 4 parts:
 - Food for home consumption, Food away from home, Apparel, Other

Diary Survey, cntd.

- Each week of the year has equal representation
- Diaries must be placed within 7 days of “earliest placement date”
- Each Diary week is treated separately for estimation purposes

Diary Survey, contd.

- Each CU completes two consecutive 7-day Diaries with three personal visits
 - 1st visit
 - Collect demographic information place week 1 Diary
 - 2nd visit
 - Diary check and recall place Diary 2
 - 3rd visit
 - Diary check and recall collect income information

Role of the Census Bureau

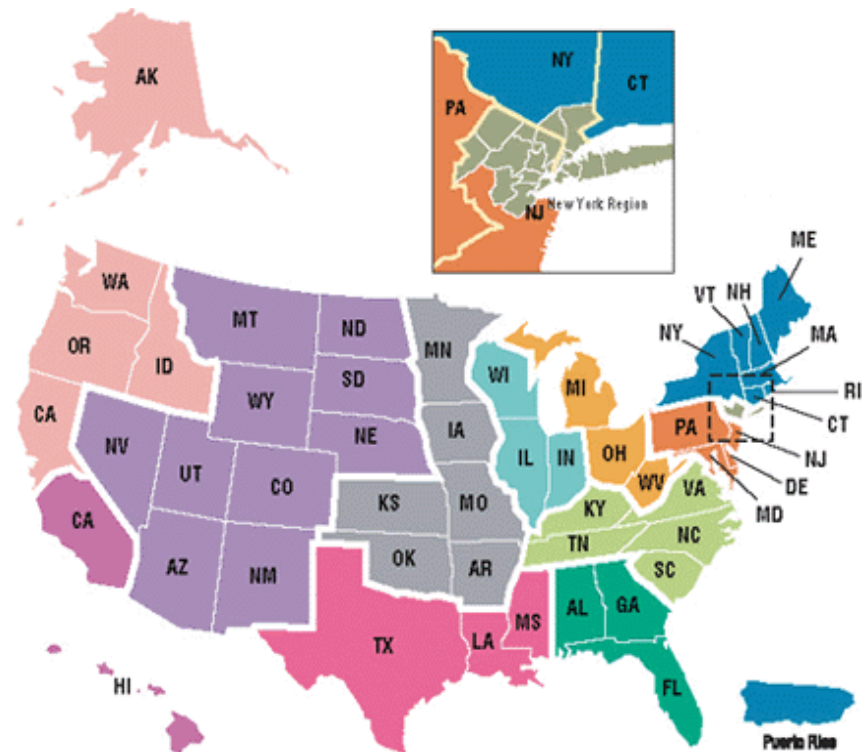
- Develops sample of housing units
 - Drawn from the decennial census of addresses
- Programs CAPI instruments
 - Including edits, according to BLS specifications
- Collects data
 - Under Title 13

Census Bureau: Processing Activities

- Interview
 - CAPI data transmitted to Census HQ, where they copy data needed for next quarter's instrument (properties, vehicles, etc.)
- Diary
 - Check-in, keying, coding, imaging operations in Jeffersonville, IN
- Monthly data are transmitted to BLS

Census Bureau: Regional Offices

- Decentralized data collection
- Conducted by the Census Bureau through its 12 ROs
- RO responsibilities vary in geographic scope, e.g.:
 - New York RO: 19 counties
 - Denver RO: 10 states
 - Los Angeles RO: Hawaii, Southern California



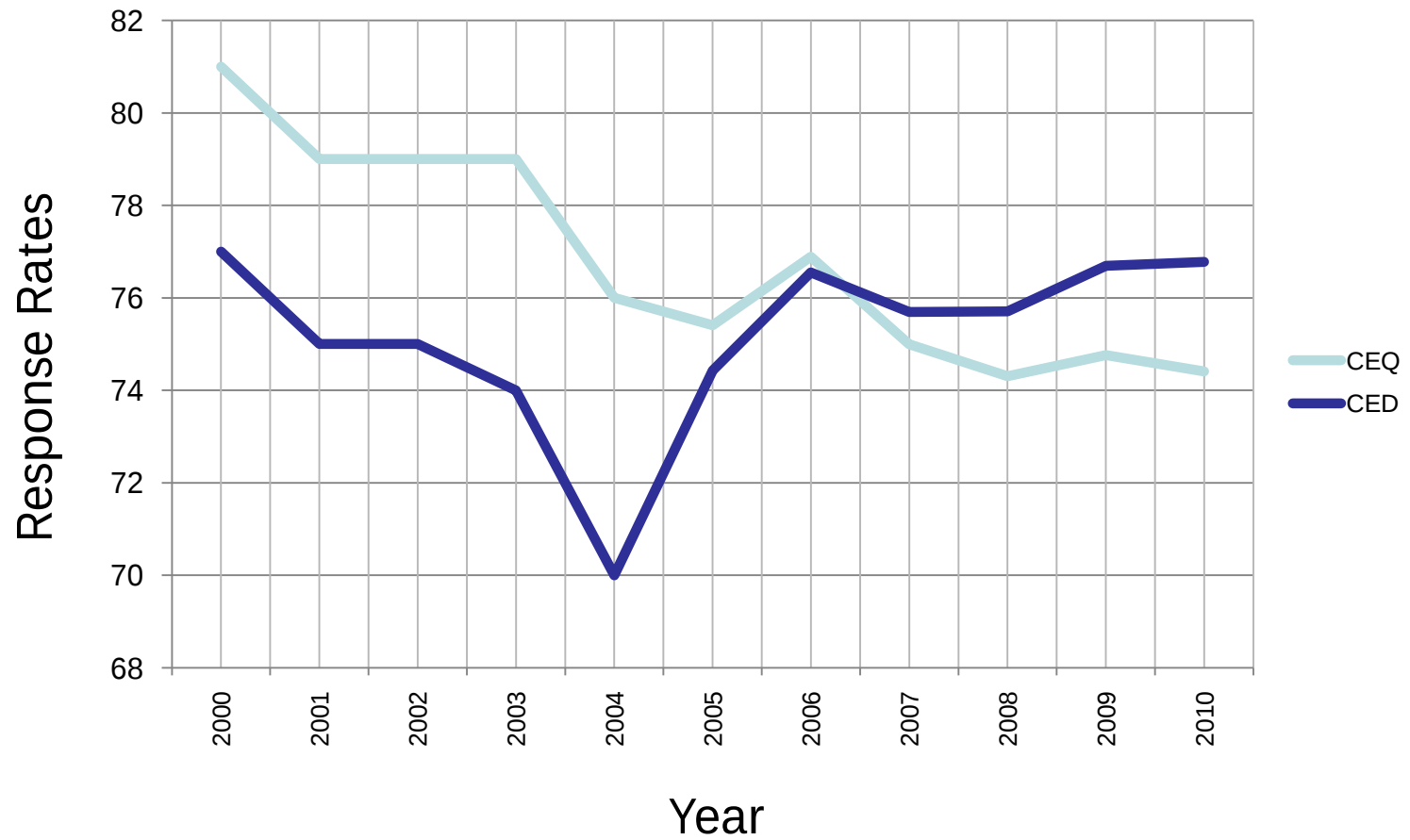
Interviewing

- Interview Survey
 - Multiple contacts *may be* required
- Diary Survey
 - Multiple contacts *are* required
- Contact History Instrument (CHI)
 - Part of both surveys
 - Data on nature and outcome of contact
 - Concerns of reluctant respondents
 - Source of detailed information about the survey process

Interviewing: Mode

- CE interview survey is designed to be conducted in person
- Approximately 33% of interviews are conducted by telephone
 - Policies recently updated to provide guidelines for telephone interviewing
- Barriers to personal interviews
 - Controlled access building and gated communities
 - Severe weather conditions (e.g., blizzard)
 - Respondent request for telephone interview

CE Response Rates, 2000-2010



Achieving Response Rate Goals

- BLS and Census have worked together to improve response rates through:
 - Incentives test
 - Better data collection instruments
 - User-friendly diary
 - Improvements to CAPI content and operation
 - Improved field materials
 - Promotional materials about the surveys
 - Translating advance letters into Spanish and other languages
 - Revised and updated Information Book
- More focused FR training