

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS TO ADD QUESTIONS TO THE 2012 GSS

**Summary.** The General Social Survey invites scholars to submit proposals to add questions to its 2012 survey. Proposals will be accepted on the basis of scientific quality and scholarly interest. Outside funding is not necessary. The deadline for submissions is April 2, 2010.

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The General Social Survey (GSS) project expects to include some user-designed, project-funded items or topical modules when it collects data in its 2012 survey, and invites proposals for such items or modules from users. Proposals submitted in response to this call need not be accompanied by funding to 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) 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 inclusion of 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, 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 grant that funds the core GSS survey provides support for 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 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 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 issues that the proposer would seek to address using them. Ideally, proposals will include the specific wording of survey items, documentation of their past use and performance in other surveys, and evidence bearing on the quality of data (validity, reliability, item nonresponse, etc.) they elicit. 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. 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. 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 draw conclusions from the survey.

Proposals may suggest that items be added to the 2012 GSS as a one-time topical module administered to a nationally representative cross-section of US adults, as most GSS topical modules have been. Note, however, that the 2012 GSS will collect baseline data for a three-wave panel study (with anticipated follow-up interviews in the 2014 and 2016 GSSs), so proposals for adding repeated content will also be entertained. 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. Moreover, proposers should be aware that NSF funding for the GSS project currently extends only through the 2012 GSS, so that any proposal involving repeated content would be accepted pending renewal funding of the project beyond 2012.

The rotating panel design of the GSS initiated in 2006 means that each GSS round now collects data for a freshly-sampled cross-section while simultaneously reinterviewing respondents from the two previous cross-sections. The reinterviews contain much of the interview time available for accommodating new content. For this logistical reason, much new content in 2012 will be administered to GSS respondents first interviewed in the previous two rounds (2008 and 2010), rather than to those newly sampled in 2012. Items in successful proposals received in response to this call therefore may be administered as part of a 2012 reinterview with respondents to the 2008 or 2010 GSSs. 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 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 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 ([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 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 2012 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 *April 2, 2010*.

Proposals submitted in response to this call will be considered by the GSS Board at its spring, 2010 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 over the following year, with interim review at the Board's fall, 2010 meeting. The Board will review the status of the selected proposals at its spring, 2011 meeting; by then 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 2011, which will establish (among many other things) the actual interview time requirements of the proposed items. At its fall, 2011 meeting, the Board will make a final determination as to the sets of items that will be included in the 2012 GSS.

It is important that investigators understand that inclusion of items cannot be assured until they have undergone the full cycle of development described above, and until the GSS Board has selected them for inclusion in the GSS at the fall, 2011 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 2012 GSS, roughly six months after 2012 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 2012 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 GSS.

[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 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 inclusion and use of the 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; and
5. If questions about multiple topics are proposed, a proposal should indicate the priority assigned to measuring the different topics in the GSS; likewise, if a proposal advocates using multiple items to measure a given topic, it should indicate which of those items are of higher and lower priority for inclusion on the GSS.

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

The Board and PIs will review and discuss proposals, and 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 regrets that it can not provide detailed critiques of unsuccessful proposals.

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 *April 2, 2010*.