

Incentives and the American Time Use Survey: Experimenting with cash

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American Time Use Survey (ATUS)

July 16, 2019

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How do
people
spend their
time?



ATUS Sample

- **Select sample of households** that completed the 8th month of the Current Population Survey (CPS)
- **Select an individual** age 15 and over from the household
- **Assign a specific day** of the week to be interviewed about time use, the “diary day”

ATUS collection



\$40 debit cards are sent to two groups

- **Regular incentive cases:** Individuals living in households for which a phone number is not available
- **Expanded incentive cases:** Cases with non-working phone numbers



ATUS sample, 2014-16

	Total	Cases with phone numbers	Regular incentive cases	Expanded incentive cases
Number of cases per year	24,596	22,548	1,533	515
Percent of ATUS sample	100.0	91.7	6.2	2.1
Percent of completes	100.0	93.3	5.2	1.6
Response rates	44.7	45.5	37.1	33.4



Characteristics of incentive cases

Compared to cases with phone numbers, incentive cases are more likely to be:

- Younger
- Non-white
- Hispanic
- Less-educated
- Living in households with lower incomes

Cost of \$40 debit cards

	Annual cost, FY 2018
Census' management costs	\$82,000
Funds sent to bank vendor	\$70,000
Expired funds, returned to Treasury	\$45,000
Cost of cashed debit cards*	\$25,000
Total cost of debit cards	\$152,000

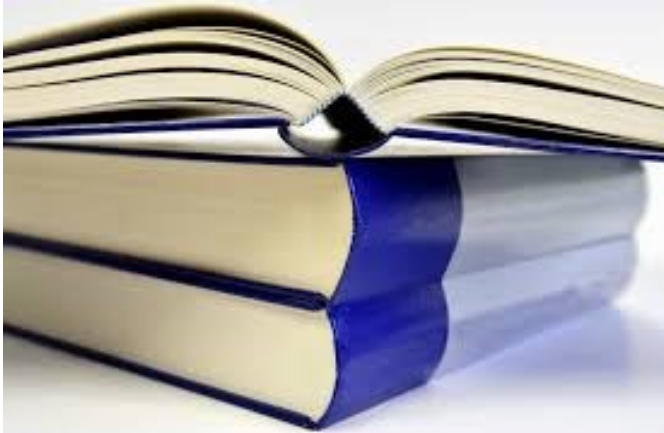
* Includes face value of debit cards, ATM fees, and associated management fees.

Question

- Can we use incentive funds more effectively?



Incentive literature

- Token amounts of prepaid incentives are effective in securing survey response
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- Andrew Mercer, et al. “How much gets you how much? Monetary incentives and response rates in household surveys,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 2015, pp. 105-129.

Incentive cost comparisons

Expense	Annual cost of sending...		
	\$40 debit cards	\$5 cash	\$10 cash
Census management costs	\$82,000	\$57,000	\$57,000
Expired funds, returned to U.S. Treasury	\$45,000	\$0	\$0
Cards cashed	\$25,000	\$0	\$0
Mailed cash incentives	\$0	\$13,500	\$27,000
Bank fees for delivering cash	\$0	\$12,000	\$12,000
Total cost of cash incentives	\$152,000	\$82,500	\$96,000

More questions

- Can we use savings to boost survey response among under-represented groups?
- If so, what amount should we send?



ATUS Response rates by age group

Age group	2003	2017	Change, 2003 to 2017 (percentage points)
15-19	58.3	33.9	-24.4
20-24	45.9	31.0	-14.9
25-29	48.5	35.2	-13.3
30-34	54.0	38.9	-15.1
35-39	55.3	42.2	-13.1
40-44	57.5	42.9	-14.5
45-49	58.5	42.1	-16.4
50-54	59.4	45.9	-13.5
55-59	63.8	50.9	-12.9
60-64	62.6	51.2	-11.5
65-69	62.4	54.5	-7.9
70 and over	53.9	50.3	-3.6

Research goal 1

- To test the effectiveness of using \$0, \$5, and \$10 cash incentives, where effectiveness is measured in terms of survey response
- Regular incentive cases will be assigned to 1 of 3 groups:
 - ▶ No incentive (control)
 - ▶ \$5 incentive
 - ▶ \$10 incentive

Research goal 2

- To test whether a \$5 or \$10 cash incentive can boost survey response among 15- to 24-year-olds
- 15- to 24-year-olds who are not already assigned an incentive will be assigned to 1 of 3 groups:
 - ▶ No incentive (control)
 - ▶ \$5 incentive
 - ▶ \$10 incentive



During the study...

Expanded incentives:

- 15- to 24-year-olds will not be eligible to become expanded incentive cases
- \$5 cash will be sent to cases that are converted to incentives after their first week in sample

Timeline for incentive study

- Now: Seeking OMB approval
- Oct. 2019 to Oct. 2020: Data collection
- Jan. 2020 to May 2021: Data processing
- June 2021 to Sept. 2021: Data analysis
- Oct. 2021: Implement incentive plan guided by study's results

Contact Information

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