

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS TO ADD QUESTIONS TO THE 2018 GSS

**Summary.** The General Social Survey invites proposals to add questions to its 2018 survey. Proposals will accepted on the basis of scientific quality and scholarly interest; outside funding is helpful but not necessary. The deadline for submissions is June 30, 2016.

The General Social Survey (GSS) project expects to include some items or short topical modules designed by users in its 2018 survey, and invites users to submit proposals recommending such items or modules. Proposals submitted in response to this call will be included based on assessments of their scientific merit; they need not be accompanied by funding to cover costs of data collection and data processing, though availability of partial or full outside support can heighten their chances of inclusion.

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; 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. As of 2016, the GSS is returning to its long-standing repeated cross-sectional design; it no longer employs the rolling panel design used between 2006 and 2014. 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://gss.norc.org/>.

The most recent National Science Foundation (NSF) award that funds the core GSS survey supports data collection costs for some user-contributed survey items, but it also requires that the GSS project raise additional support from other sources. This means that the survey can include fewer unfunded user-designed items than was possible between 2008 and 2014. Hence, scientifically meritorious proposals that are accompanied by partial or full financial support will have an advantage in this competition. All proposals are welcome, however, regardless of whether they are funded. This call describes the criteria for user-contributed proposals and the process through which decisions will be reached concerning them.

Outside-funded proposals for space on the GSS also may be submitted for consideration outside of this competition. Investigators interested in initiating such proposals 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).

### Proposals for New Content

Proposals submitted in response to this call may advocate inclusion of supplementary GSS content from as little as a single survey question, to a short scale, or a brief module of interrelated items about a specific topic. Longer, multitopic modules cannot be accommodated within the available interview time. Proposals should articulate the specific research issues that

would be addressed 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. 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. 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.

Items from successful proposals will be added to the 2018 GSS as a one-time topical module administered to a nationally representative cross-section of US adults. The GSS no longer employs a panel design, so user proposals should not envision repeated administration.

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 provides 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 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) making a proposal. New content ideally will enhance the understanding and/or usefulness of GSS items in the

replicating core (<http://gss.norc.org/Documents/other/Replicating%20Core.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 2018 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 **June 30, 2016**.

Proposals submitted in response to this call will be reviewed by the GSS Board at its spring, 2016 meeting. At that meeting, some proposals will be selected for subsequent development, which can 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 2017. The Board will review the status of the selected proposals at its fall, 2016 meeting; by then it will be essential that proposals specify provisional question wordings for all prospective items (if the wording was not available in the initial proposal). The Board and PIs will select some items for inclusion in a conventional pretest that would be conducted in the summer of 2017, which will establish (among many other things) the actual interview time requirements of the proposed items. At its fall, 2017 meeting, the Board will make final decisions about the items to be included in the 2018 GSS.

It is important that investigators understand that inclusion of items in the GSS is not assured until the items 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, 2017 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 2018 GSS, roughly six months after 2018 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 2018 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 2010-2016 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://gss.norc.org/Documents/other/Paid%20Supplements%202015.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;
2. The specific topics, and ideally the specific survey items or questions, that would be included in the GSS, together with available evidence of data quality;
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;
5. Proposals involving questions about two or more concepts should indicate the priority assigned to measuring the different concepts. Likewise, proposals to measure a given concept using multiple items should indicate priorities among the items; and
6. (Optional) Statement indicating any outside financial support for inclusion of the items that is assured or being sought.

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

When similar calls for proposals were issued in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016, 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 **June 30, 2016**.