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National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
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Washington, DC 20230

Submitted via email to [rgoldberg@ntia.gov](mailto:rgoldberg@ntia.gov)

August 1, 2023

Dear Mr. Goldberg:

My name is Stacey Wedlake, Research Scientist at the University of Washington Information School, and focus much of my work on issues of digital equity and digital skills.

I agree with the National Skills Coalition that **the NTIA Internet Use Survey is a unique and invaluable source** of data about US residents' digital access and adoption.<sup>1</sup> The federal government is the sole source of statistically representative, rigorous information on this topic, which is of profound importance to workers, businesses, and other stakeholders. No other data collection effort or vendor even comes close.

I offer two places for improvement in the current survey draft.

First, I co-sign with the suggestions from the National Skills Coalition concerning including more data on digital skills. The United States lacks **basic, digital skills data**. Neither the federal government nor states, localities, or the private sector have been gathering the type of baseline information about Americans' digital skills. While data on high-speed internet access and digital devices is of course crucial, we urge NTIA to ensure that the 2023 iteration of the Internet Use Survey also captures specific, focused data on digital *skills*.

- **I support NTIA's proposal to ask respondents about specific tasks** they may carry out using digital technologies (pages 7-9 of the [proposed questions](#)). This is a useful proxy measure to help gauge whether people are (or are not) equipped to use computers and other digital tools to accomplish key activities of daily life, including those that are vital to health, well-being, and economic stability.
- **I strongly recommend that NTIA add 3 questions pertaining to education and employment.** The survey already (appropriately) includes three targeted questions focused on health. Economic stability is equally crucial to individuals' and families' well-being, and for that reason we think it is well worth adding a handful of targeted questions on that topic. We propose specific questions below:
  - **Education/workforce Q1:** In the past 12 months, have difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills stopped you from applying for a job offer or promotion? (YES/NO)
  - **Education/workforce Q2:** In the past 12 months, has there been a work task or responsibility that you were unable to complete because of difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills? (YES/NO)

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as the Current Population Survey (CPS) Computer and Internet Use Supplement.

- **Education/workforce Q3:** In the past 12 months, has there been an educational or learning opportunity that you were not able to participate in because of difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills? (YES/NO)

(If there is room in the survey, I would also suggest asking an additional set of three questions, similar to the three above except focusing on “problems with internet access.” But we recognize that NTIA is juggling many competing demands for data, and we recommend the above questions as the *highest* priority.)

- **I strongly recommend that NTIA add a question probing who people turn to when they do not know how to do a digital task.** See example below.
  - **Question:** Thinking of the most recent time that you needed help using a computer or another digital device (such as a smartphone) to complete a task, where did you turn to for help? (CHOOSE ONE)
    - I figured it out by myself
    - Online tutorials or videos
    - Friend or family member
    - Co-worker or supervisor
    - Community institution such as a school, library, or religious organization
    - Business help desk (such as Best Buy’s Geek Squad or Apple’s Genius Bar)
    - Other (*record verbatim answer*)
    - Don’t know/I can’t remember needing help

Second, I urge you to examine the wording of questions on page 11 concerning the reasons why respondents do not use the Internet at home. Other researchers have written extensively about the difficulties of asking about “relevance.” In [this blog post on Benton from 2019, Colin Rhinesmith and Bibi Reisdorf argue](#) that

*The design of survey questions can often be leading, particularly when “no need” or “no interest” is the first reason listed on surveys asking why people do not pay for broadband service at home.*

In addition to reordering the question responses, I also recommend adding a reason category that references the complexity of signing up for broadband such as “too complicated” or “need help to do so.”

I appreciate NTIA’s careful attention to these important issues and would be happy to discuss any of this further. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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