

**Bureau of Labor Statistics Report to the Appropriations Committees on a  
New Cohort to the National Longitudinal Surveys  
March 2021**

**Updated 5-Year Plan for Design and Cost  
(Fiscal Years 2021 to 2025)**

The following report provides an update on Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) investment into the planning, development and implementation of a new National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) cohort, in response to the Statement of Managers accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Pub.L. 116-260). The referenced House Report 116-450 included the following directive:

*BLS shall brief the Committees on Appropriations with updated estimates for the annual costs and five-year plan for implementing the new NLSY cohort within 90 days of enactment of this Act.*

This report updates information provided in the FY 2020 report to Congress on this topic. Background on the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) and overall approach to planning and development from the previous report can be found in the Appendix beginning on page 5 of this document. The updated plans and estimates for a new cohort build upon the activities undertaken by the NLS program in FY 2020 and in the early part of FY 2021, which included consultation with several internal and external stakeholders to develop effective plans for additional outreach. This work has sharpened the BLS vision for several steps to be taken during FY 2021.

**New Cohort Activities in FY 2020 and FY 2021**

NLS focused its efforts in FY 2020 on developing plans for the FY 2021 activities described below. NLS consulted with members of the NLS Technical Review Committee on how best to reach out to the broader user community for their input on desired new cohort content and the incorporation of non-survey data sources. Additionally, NLS staff conducted a review of other large scale, longitudinal social surveys that launched significant redesign efforts or new waves in the last 15 years. These included but were not limited to the National Survey of Family Growth, the Middle Grade Longitudinal Study, and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. A conference on a new NLS cohort originally scheduled for March 2020 was postponed until October 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below is a summary and high-level timeline of the major activities that NLS has begun or plans to begin in FY 2021.

### CHRR at The Ohio State University/National Science Foundation New Cohort Conference (FY 2021 Quarters 1 and 2)

In October 2020, CHRR at The Ohio State University, currently NLS's prime contractor, hosted a conference entitled, "Shaping a New National Longitudinal Survey of Youth". The conference brought together academics from many disciplines, leaders from federal agencies, and independent researchers to share information about previous achievements of the NLS, identify emerging and ongoing needs for studying upcoming workforce generations, and discuss how a new cohort could meet those needs. It established a critical foundation of interest in new cohort development from which to build stakeholder engagement and provided critical directions for the shaping of the new cohort's content. CHRR is in the process of documenting the proceedings as well as input received from participants after the event and expects to have a report available by spring 2021. NLS will use the report as a building block for additional stakeholder outreach and as a key reference for the work of its content panels.

### Sample Frame Assessment (FY 2021 Quarters 1 and 2)

In the first and second quarters, BLS subject matter experts have been assessing the different sample frames available for a new cohort. NLS will summarize its findings and provide a recommendation to senior BLS management by May 2021.

### User Outreach (FY 2021 Quarters 2 to 4)

After consulting with the NLS Technical Review Committee, NLS determined that the best way to obtain feedback on a new cohort is through a series of web seminars conducted in partnership with other federal agencies. These seminars will provide the opportunity for greater community engagement, because they can include introductory information about NLS suitable for wider audiences. By partnering with other agencies, NLS can tailor the discussions towards survey features that are relevant to these agencies and the associated user communities. NLS has been in contact with several agencies [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Department of Justice, Department of Education, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Evaluation office at the Department of Labor (DOL)] to begin planning the webinars, which NLS expects to hold by June 2021.

To ensure outreach is as inclusive as possible, NLS plans to gather additional input through a survey of the public to be accessed through the BLS website during the fourth quarter of FY 2021.

### Dissemination Assessment (FY 2021 Quarter 2 to FY 2022 Quarter 3)

As it designs the new cohort, NLS will evaluate alternatives for data dissemination. Potential options include development and maintenance of an in-house dissemination system and the use of a contractor-based system. Current NLS cohorts use the latter approach, but this may not be optimal for the new cohort. To evaluate the potential use of an in-house dissemination system, NLS will determine the related costs and benefits; this work will include developing requirements and cost estimates to build and maintain the system. NLS would like to complete

the dissemination assessment by the third quarter of FY 2022 so that BLS can determine whether to include dissemination as part of the new cohort contracts.

#### Vendor Capability Assessment (FY 2021 Quarters 2 to 4)

As part of the information gathering process, NLS intends to put out a Request for Information (RFI) to (a) assess vendor capabilities to work with NLS in developing a new cohort/survey, and (b) solicit ideas and feedback from vendors on how best to do this work in the current regulatory and financial environment. In addition to putting out the RFI, the NLS expects to work with the DOL Office of the Senior Procurement Executive (OSPE) to hold a “Vendor Day.” This will allow for greater interaction with vendors and discussion of technical questions regarding information technology, security, data dissemination and contract structure.

Based on the information collected from the RFI and Vendor Day, NLS staff will compile a summary of findings and recommendations. This will be used as an input for developing the Request for Proposal (RFP).

#### Content Panels (FY 2021 Quarter 3 to FY 2023 Quarter 2)

Determining the structure and the content of the data to be collected from the new cohort will require an extensive, coordinated effort among leading subject matter experts in a wide range of disciplines. As it has with previous cohorts, NLS will convene content panels to perform this vital function. NLS plans to put out an RFP for a vendor to conduct content panels for the new cohort. These content panels will consist of experts in particular fields (such as employment, education, and health) to review the questionnaire content of the existing cohorts and recommend questionnaire content for the new cohort. NLS plans for the RFP to go out in early summer 2021, with a target signing date prior to the end of FY 2021.

#### Request for Proposal(s) - Design through Wave 1 collection (FY 2021 Quarter 4 to FY 2022 Quarter 4)

The current intention of NLS is that much of the work in developing and fielding this new cohort will be performed by experts under contract with BLS. Agreement on the scope of the contract-- the nature and type of work to be performed, as well as the structure and funding of the work-- must be determined prior to putting out a RFP.

An Integrated Project Team (IPT) will be formed to develop the solicitation. It shall include stakeholders from across the BLS representing the NLS program, and administrative and IT offices, as well as stakeholders from DOL OSPE.

NLS anticipates that the process of scope determination, putting out an RFP, and reviewing bidders will take approximately 12 months. Whether work is combined into one large contract or is scattered among smaller contracts may impact how quickly work on different parts of the survey may begin. NLS does not anticipate starting this work until late in fiscal year 2021 so that other aspects of the research phase can be completed.

## Updated Estimates for Annual Costs

These planned activities are broadly consistent with the 5-year plan that BLS previously proposed for development of the new NLSY cohort (described in more detail in the Appendix), with two exceptions:

1. Some of the activities originally anticipated for FY 2020 were pushed into FY 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the postponement of the CHRR/NSF conference, originally planned for March 2020, to October 2020. The cost for FY 2020 and out-year estimates are revised to account for this shift in timeline as shown in the table below.
2. Initial planning revealed that the development of a dissemination system for the new cohort may require a larger expenditure than originally anticipated. The estimated costs reflect current projections for this effort.

The updated cost estimates for the 5-year plan are as follows:

<b>FY</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Major Tasks</b>
2020	\$0.2 million (actual)	Planning
2021	\$2.0 million	Stakeholder outreach, including conferences and web seminars; and continue planning, including content panels, assessments of sample frames, dissemination needs, and vendor capabilities
2022	\$3.0 million	Continue content panels and other design activities (including sampling, survey, materials, dissemination)
2023	\$14.5 million	Complete content panels, continue design, and begin survey development (sampling, survey, questionnaire, materials, dissemination, and systems work)
2024	\$14.5 million	Continue survey and systems development and begin pretesting preparations
2025	\$17.0 million	Pretest fielding, revisions to systems and the survey resulting from the pretest, and preparation for round 1 screening and data collection to occur in 2026

Several of the above estimates are preliminary and will continue to be refined as planning and development activities continue. Although the increases to BLS statistical programs provided in the FY 2020 and FY 2021 appropriations are funding the planning and stakeholder outreach efforts in FY 2020 and 2021, the BLS also has needed to use these increases to cover federal pay raises, as well as increases in agency Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) contributions, while adhering to the requirements of maintaining staffing levels and other statistical products. Due to these required costs, the current BLS appropriation is insufficient to fund many of the significant and costly activities for a new NLS cohort, including design, formal development, or fielding of a new cohort. At this time, BLS anticipates that the ongoing annual cost after development would be \$20 million, though an additional \$7 million could be needed in FY 2026 for one-time costs of lengthier interviews during the first year of collection due to screening of the sample, obtaining consent, and interviewing parents.

## APPENDIX

Information in this appendix was taken from the report outlining cost and design options for a new youth cohort to the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) in response to the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanied the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (Pub.L. 116-94), which directed the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to:

*Initiate spending on the planning and development of a new National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) cohort. BLS shall brief the Committees on the annual costs and a five-year plan for implementing the new NLSY cohort within 90 days of enactment of this Act.*

The full report is available at <https://www.bls.gov/bls/congressional-reports/report-to-the-appropriations-committees-on-a-new-cohort-to-the-national-longitudinal-surveys.pdf>.

### Background Information on the National Longitudinal Surveys

The design options presented in this report build upon BLS experience and analysis of its two ongoing longitudinal surveys. Reports and additional information about these surveys are available upon request.

1. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79)  
The NLSY79 sample is composed of 12,686 young men and women who were born in the years 1957 to 1964. Data were first collected in 1979, when sample members were ages 14-22. In fall 2019, BLS completed round 28 of data collection with NLSY79 sample members who are ages 55 to 63. BLS has followed this cohort of late Baby Boomers for nearly 40 years, recording their lives from their teens into their 50s and early 60s.
2. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)  
The NLSY97 began over 20 years ago with the collection of data from a sample of approximately 9,000 youths who were born in the years 1980 to 1984. The sample members were ages 12-16 as of December 31, 1996. In fall 2019, BLS began round 19 of data collection for this cohort with sample members ages 35 to 40.

Over the years, thousands of academic journal articles and reports have examined NLS data to improve the understanding of the U.S. labor market and help policymakers develop programs to enhance the well-being of American workers. The longitudinal approach of the NLS program provides data to economists, sociologists, and other researchers in government, academia, and private organizations to answer such questions as how wages change over time, how schooling and training contribute to the development and maintenance of skills to obtain and keep good jobs over one's career, how individuals navigate work and family responsibilities, and how individuals plan for retirement as their careers come to an end.

To continue building on these longstanding strengths of the NLS program, BLS envisions that a new youth cohort would cover a broad range of topics related to labor market outcomes.

Respondents in previous NLS cohorts have been asked a core set of questions that provide extensive information on employment, training, education, sources of income, assets, marital status, fertility, health, attitudes toward work, and occupational and geographical mobility. BLS anticipates that the new youth survey content would cover these same topics, thus enabling the study of educational experiences, achievement, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and the transition from school to work; training programs and training in the workplace; the value of early-career job exploration; geographic mobility; relationships between the workplace and the well-being of the family and family transitions; drug and alcohol use; juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior; fertility and childbearing; and employment and earnings of workers.

As with past NLS cohorts, a new NLS youth survey would collect detailed information about each job held, along with the characteristics of that job, including wages, hours, occupation, and industry. Each period of nonwork would be investigated to capture time spent looking for work and other factors that distinguish the unemployed from those not in the labor force. Detailed information would be collected on education and training, and events such as marriage and divorce, as well as fertility, all of which affect labor market choices.

### **Planning and Development Approach**

As part of its planning and development of a new youth cohort, BLS would also consider how best to include data sources outside of survey responses to complement and enrich the survey data it collects as part of a new youth cohort. These additional data sources could include cognitive assessments, school information and school records, activity monitors, time diaries, and parent interviews, as well as other administrative data. The identification of useful data sources and the application of innovative technologies to blend them with NLS survey data is a key focus of the NLS program's ongoing improvement efforts.

BLS estimates that the planning and development of a new youth cohort would take approximately five years. To begin, extensive consultation would be conducted with stakeholders in government, academia, and the private sector, such as federal agencies, policymakers, users of NLS products, and relevant advisory committees. BLS currently is considering several approaches, such as public forums, expert panels, targeted interviews, and formal information solicitations, to ensure that its outreach gathers insight from the stakeholder community's broad range of knowledge and interest. The planning and development process also would include significant efforts devoted to designing the sample and the survey and developing a system to collect, process, and disseminate the data. Additionally, a new survey would need to undergo testing and complete the review and clearance processes as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act. Round 1 data collection could occur as early as Fiscal Year (FY) 2026.

The proposed timeline includes a lengthy period for stakeholder outreach and survey planning. BLS has determined that such a time period is necessary in order to determine practices that achieve high data quality while controlling costs and risks. This determination recognizes that the survey landscape has changed dramatically over the last three decades. Many inputs and factors used to develop the NLSY97 cohort are no longer valid or relevant, and the federal government has not initiated a longitudinal survey of this size and scope for many years. The

proposed outreach and planning period would allow BLS to investigate approaches to address several factors, including:

- Declining response rates across surveys
- Increasing costs that exceed the rate of inflation
- A reduction in the use of landlines
- Alternative modes of communication, survey administration and incentive payments
- Prioritized use of administrative and other existing data
- Integration of paradata and responsive design into data collection activities
- Enhanced respondent confidentiality and data security requirements
- Comparability across retired and existing cohorts

While it may be possible to accelerate the outreach and planning phase with additional resources, a deliberative planning and outreach effort is likely to result in enhanced data quality and long-run cost-effectiveness. In addition, other areas of the schedule cannot be easily compressed. For example, if BLS decides to contract some or all of this work to an outside vendor, it would require a significant lead time of 12 to 18 months to procure these services. There may be ways to accelerate implementation of the survey, but that is difficult to forecast without adequate discussion and research.

BLS recommends the first round of interviewing be an in-person survey of approximately 15,000 respondents in the age range of 11 to 16. The sample for the new youth cohort would be representative of the U.S. population from these birth years at the time the new survey begins. BLS would consider the inclusion of oversamples to facilitate statistically reliable analyses of sub-groups whose employment and economic outcomes may be of special interest.

A sample size in the neighborhood of 15,000 respondents strikes what BLS believes to be a reasonable balance between cost and research objectives. The cost estimates are based upon fielding annual in-person surveys to ensure that the data are timely and to facilitate identifying changes in schooling and employment as the youth move through their teens, a period where many school and work transitions occur and administrative data do not necessarily capture wages and earnings. Different interviewing schedules will be considered after consultation with stakeholders. Reducing the level of detail or survey periodicity would reduce the estimated costs, but not proportionately, due to relatively fixed infrastructure and development costs. As part of stakeholder outreach and planning activities carried out in the next two years, BLS will refine its proposed approach to introducing a new cohort and will update estimated costs accordingly.