

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN SCALE

The last decade has seen growing interest in administrative burden in government programs. One basic problem is that there is no widely accepted measure of the experience of burden that has been tested and validated. As governments become more attentive to administrative burdens (see, for example, President Biden's [Customer Experience agenda](#)), many will mandate that agencies identify and reduce such burdens. Measures of user experiences with programs provide one simple and standardized way of doing so, providing a basis by which researchers and the civic tech community can help government to address real-world problems.

The [Better Government Lab](#), with support from [Schmidt Futures Social Safety Net Product Studio](#) set out to solve this problem. To do so, we collected data 3,817 SNAP (food stamps) users with an online survey in December 2022-January 2023. We tested a variety of items using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis using a split-sample method.

What did we find? We developed both a three-item scale and a single-item question.

Recommended three-item administrative burden scale

We want to hear about your most recent experiences with [program/process]. This includes applying for AND/OR renewing your benefits. Please think about your most recent experience with the program when you respond to the question.

Learning costs:

How difficult was the process of finding information about the program, such as how to apply or what you needed to do to renew your benefit?

Response categories:

Very difficult, somewhat difficult, neither easy nor difficult, somewhat easy, very easy.

Compliance costs:

How was the process of filling out the paperwork, providing proof of eligibility (such as pay stubs, proof of residence, birth certificates, etc.), and/or attending interviews?

Response categories:

Very difficult, somewhat difficult, neither easy nor difficult, somewhat easy, very easy.

Psychological costs (frustration):

Please describe how you felt during these experiences?

Response categories:

FRUSTRATED: Extremely, very, moderately, slightly, not at all

In the actual survey we specified SNAP, but the wording was chosen to be easily adaptable to other processes or programs.

Can you use a single item that serves as a stand-in for the entire scale?

If you only have room for a single item, the “overall” item is intended to serve this purpose. This correlates well (between .62 and .70) with the other items and with the scale itself at .76.

Overall summary item

We want to hear about your most recent experiences with [program/process]. This includes applying for AND/OR renewing your benefits. Please think about your most recent experience with the program when you respond to the question.

How would you describe this experience overall?

Response categories:

Very difficult, somewhat difficult, neither easy nor difficult, somewhat easy, very easy.

Simple predictive validity tests

To test the predictive validity of the items, we correlated with individual factors expected to increase burden. The correlations are significant, and the single-item and three-item scale perform similarly, though the scale explains more of the variation. This implies that the scale captures potential sources of inequality in citizen-state interactions. For example, people who are older, have less education, poorer health, financial scarcity, and less experience with the program report more burden using both the three-item and single item (though the longer scale explains more variation).

Comparison with federal government customer experience scale

We compared the scale to the existing [CX survey items](#) recommended by the federal government. The two scales are correlated, as one would expect, but not highly so, suggesting they capture different aspects of people’s experiences. The shorter burden scale explains more of the sources of variation in potential sources of inequality than the seven-item CX scale.

Next steps

Having developed the scale, we are anxious to put it to use in a variety of field settings in user surveys. This will help to further validate the scale. Anyone is welcome to use it. We are happy to help modify according to the needs of users, but ask they consider sharing (anonymized) data for additional validity tests with the Better Government Lab.

We are also placing the analysis conducted thus far under peer review. It is available upon request.