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The Thoughtful Households Relating InVesting Experiences (THRIVE) Panel

Technical Documentation

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ABSTRACT

This report provides technical documentation of methods used in the development of the Thoughtful Households Relating InVesting Experiences (THRIVE) survey panel. It discusses the goals of the panel, the timeline of surveys, how surveys are fielded, how respondents are sampled, and how weights are calculated for the panel.

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Introduction

Thoughtful Households Relating InVesting Experiences (THRIVE) is a survey panel created and maintained by the SEC’s Office of Investor Research (OIR). OIR is a multidisciplinary research group that serves investors by helping to identify, analyze, and address investors’ concerns. Through its role as part of the SEC’s Office of the Investor Advocate (OIAD), OIR’s research on investor behavior and decision making seeks to provide an empirical basis for policy considerations in support of the OIAD and SEC’s efforts to understand problems that investors may have and analyze the potential impacts of rules and regulations on investors.

OIR established THRIVE to facilitate frequent and direct survey outreach with the general public. THRIVE provides a platform to help OIR conduct two primary activities: conduct surveys that provide timely empirical data on investment-related topics, and carry out investor testing projects to inform SEC rulemaking and long-run research priorities. As part of the THRIVE quarterly surveys, the same 7,500 respondents are invited to answer recurring questions on investment decisions and household events, as well as novel questions examining contemporaneous areas of interest. For investor testing projects, THRIVE respondents (or subsamples of respondents) can participate in custom projects designed by OIR. THRIVE is representative of the overall US population, with oversamples based on race and ethnicity to allow for subgroup analysis.

Goals of THRIVE

OIR created THRIVE to provide a nationally representative survey panel focused on investing and the policy interests of OIAD and the SEC. To that end, the content in THRIVE surveys reflect OIAD interest in understanding perspectives regarding: (1) the content, presentation, and manner of delivery of financial product information; (2) investor experiences related to the provision of financial advice and related communications; and (3) investor participation, perception, and decision-making in an evolving economic environment. The panel

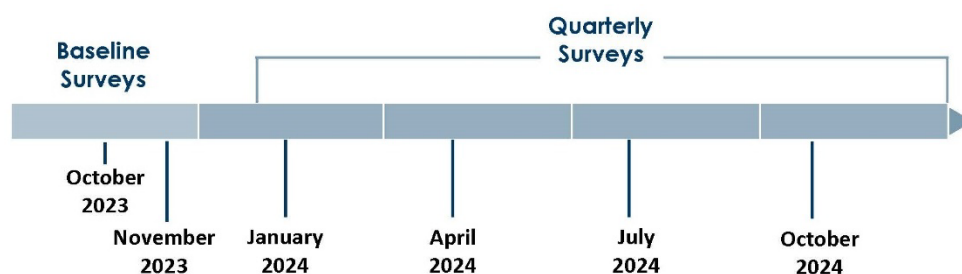
structure allows OIR to create and track repeated measures over time and to respond quickly to emerging policy and economic changes.

Methods

Survey Timeline and Content

THRIVE consists of three types of surveys: baseline surveys, quarterly surveys, and custom investor testing surveys. Figure 1 provides a timeline of the baseline and quarterly surveys. All surveys are written by OIR, and OIR developed much of the survey content through previous OIR surveys or by using qualitative testing. Survey content is selected and ordered to minimize respondent burden, where possible. OIR aims for quarterly survey content that can be completed in less than 15 minutes, on average, and other survey content that can be completed in less than 20 minutes on average.

Figure 1. Timeline of Baseline and Quarterly Surveys.



There were two baseline surveys fielded in the fall of 2023: the empanelment survey and the financial profile survey. These baseline surveys were designed to provide an initial, thorough measure of key investor behaviors and characteristics (such as types of accounts held by respondents and net worth) as well as fixed characteristics that are unlikely to change considerably over time (such as financial literacy and perceived barriers to investing). Baseline survey data provides ongoing value to the SEC by allowing surveys to be sent specifically to individuals with certain characteristics (e.g., annuity owners or young investors), ensuring future data collection is cost-effective.

Following the baseline surveys, OIR started quarterly THRIVE surveys. There are two sections to each quarterly survey. The first section contains key recurring content, including investment behaviors in the last 90 days and measures of current financial status. These recurring modules allow OIR to see recent changes in investors' finances, such as how an employment shock may affect 401(k) withdrawals, or whether investors change the frequency of new investments over the course of a year. The second section changes across quarters and includes questions to provide a deeper understanding of a given individual's responses, or to measure concurrent topics of interest. One-time modules can measure relatively stable

individual characteristics that were not included in previous surveys, such as risk tolerance. Re-fielding these modules can also allow OIR to monitor changes over periods longer than a quarter, such as how the number of accredited investors in the US changes from year to year, or whether households shift in and out of paying capital gains taxes.

In addition to baseline and quarterly surveys, THRIVE can be used for custom investor testing surveys to address immediate policy needs. These surveys can take many forms but may be used to inform policy considerations, improve research methods, or examine other areas of long-term interest.

Fielding

All THRIVE surveys are fielded online through NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel.¹ All surveys are reviewed by NORC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that respondents' research rights are protected. Quarterly surveys are launched the third Friday of the month, with respondents receiving an initial email message inviting them to the survey and up to five email reminders if they have not already participated. In the second week, all non-respondents also receive a text message reminder. All respondents are compensated for their time, typically receiving 3,000 AmeriPoints (roughly equivalent to \$3) for participating in a 15-minute survey.² Respondents may also receive performance related incentives to encourage incentive compatible responses to economic choice questions. Following fielding, NORC provides the SEC respondents' answers, previously measured demographic characteristics, and survey weights (described below). NORC maintains personally identifiable information about respondents; however, the SEC does not receive this information.

Sampling

For THRIVE, OIR aimed to recruit 7,500 panel members who completed both baseline surveys. To start this process, 33,381 members of the AmeriSpeak panel were invited to participate in the THRIVE empanelment survey, which was fielded from October 13 to November 24, 2023. In total 10,246 people responded. Members of the AmeriSpeak panel are recruited using address-based sampling to ensure that the panel is representative of the nation. Approximately one week after completing the empanelment survey, each respondent was invited to the financial profile survey and had up to four weeks to complete the survey. As such, the financial profile was open to respondents from October 27, 2023 to December 5, 2023 and yielded 9,216 respondents. Both surveys were conducted online and by phone.

¹ The AmeriSpeak® panel is a probability-based panel funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, and designed to be representative of the US household population, including all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with oversamples of Hispanic, Black and Asian respondents. Additional information is available at <https://amerispeak.norc.uchicago.edu/content/dam/amerispeak/research/pdf/AmeriSpeak%20Technical%20Overview%202019%2002%2018.pdf>. While the AmeriSpeak panel includes both online and telephone respondents, only online respondents are included in THRIVE.

² Incentives can help to limit attrition in panel surveys, increase response rates, and improve representativeness and data quality (Gortiz 2006, Mack 1998, Millar and Dillman 2011, Singer and Kulka 2001, and Singer and Ye 2013).

From these two baseline surveys, 7,500 respondents were selected to join the THRIVE panel. Both the empanelment survey and the panel members selected for THRIVE oversampled Non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and Non-Hispanic Asian respondents. Some respondents in the AmeriSpeak panel participated in previous surveys conducted by OIR in 2019 and 2020. Our target was for one third of respondents to have participated in those past surveys. Finally, we wanted to have a mix of investors and non-investors, with at least 1000 non-investors in the panel. Tables 1 and 2 show descriptive statistics of the panelists both with and without weights.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of THRIVE sample used in weighting.

	Percent of Empanelment Respondents (unweighted)	Percent of THRIVE Respondents (unweighted)	Percent of THRIVE Respondents (weighted)
Age			
18-24	4.6%	5.1%	12.8%
25-34	18.4%	19.7%	18.8%
35-44	18%	19.2%	18.3%
45-54	14.2%	15.3%	14.3%
55-64	18.5%	19.6%	18.5%
65-74	16.7%	14.8%	12.0%
75+	9.6%	6.3%	5.3%
Education			
Less than HS	4.4%	4.2%	9.4%
HS graduate or equivalent	15.6%	15.5%	28.8%
Some college/ associates degree	36.0%	37.2%	27.9%
Bachelor's degree	25.3%	25.0%	20.2%
Post grad study/professional degree	18.7%	18.0%	13.6%
Gender			
Female	55.5%	55.6%	50.2%
Male	44.5%	44.4%	49.8%
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian-Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	7.0%	8.4%	8.0%
Black, non-Hispanic	16.8%	17.6%	12.7%
Hispanic	15.7%	18.1%	19.9%
White, non-Hispanic	57.1%	52.7%	57.4%
Other, non-Hispanic	1.0%	1.0%	0.6%
2+, non-Hispanic	2.3%	2.1%	1.4%
Geographical Region			
East North Central	16.8%	16.6%	13.8%
East South Central	5.2%	5.1%	5.5%
Mid-Atlantic	9.3%	8.7%	12.2%
Mountain	8.0%	7.5%	7.3%
New England	3.9%	3.8%	4.6%
Pacific	20.0%	21.2%	16.9%
South Atlantic	19.1%	19.2%	20.8%
West North Central	8.3%	8.2%	6.2%
West South Central	9.3%	9.7%	12.5%
Sample Size	10243	7500	7500

Table 2: Additional Demographic characteristics of THRIVE sample.

	Percent of Empanelment Respondents (unweighted)	Percent of THRIVE Respondents (unweighted)	Percent of THRIVE Respondents (weighted)
Income			
Under \$30,000	20.72%	19.68%	21.91%
\$30,000 to \$50,000	16.18%	15.93%	15.45%
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	19.46%	19.44%	18.5%
\$75,000 to under \$100,000	14.05%	14.45%	14.7%
\$100,000 to under \$150,000	16.17%	16.57%	15.82%
\$150,000 or more	13.43%	13.92%	13.62%
Marital Status			
Married	50.04%	50.91%	48.2%
Widowed	4.69%	3.8%	3.33%
Divorced	12.44%	11.48%	9.8%
Separated	3.87%	3.64%	3.88%
Never married	28.97%	30.17%	34.79%
Investor Status			
Investor	84.98%	85.4%	82.23%
Non Investor	15.02%	14.6%	17.77%
Participation in 2019 Surveys			
Participated	34.89%	33.05%	27.68%
Did not participate	65.11%	66.95%	72.32%
Sample Size	10243	7500	7500

Weights

Survey data typically includes weights to adjust for any imbalance in the demographic characteristics of the sample relative to the US population. For the quarterly surveys, two weights are produced – a cross-sectional weight and longitudinal weight. Cross-sectional weights allow us to make the data representative of the current population at the time of the study. Longitudinal weights are used to study changes since baseline and using sample characteristics at the time of the baseline surveys. Both weights are calculated using the same procedure. The weights account for selection into AmeriSpeak, selection and response into the THRIVE panel, and use a raking algorithm to align the sample with known population demographic benchmarks for:

- Age interacted with Race/Ethnicity
- Gender interacted with Race/Ethnicity
- Geographical Region interacted with Race/Ethnicity
- Education interacted with Race/Ethnicity

- Age interacted with Gender

Benchmark for these sociodemographic characteristics come from the most recent available United States Census Annual Social and Economic Supplement for the Current Population Survey.³ The demographic group categories match those shown in Table 1. At the final stage of the weighting process, any extreme weights may be trimmed so they do not overly influence the survey estimates. After trimming, weights are re-raked to the same population totals to produce the final study weights.

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³ <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-asec.html>