

**2012 Census of Governments – Finance Components  
Exploratory Research - Protocol Draft  
June 18, 2010**

*(This protocol is a guide – the questions presented here won't necessarily be asked exactly as worded in the protocol or in this order. It is important to note that not all questions will be asked in every interview.)*

**Part A– Background Information**

**1. Respondent Background**

- a. Can you tell me a little about the services [government name] provides?
- b. Can you tell me a little about your role at this [government name]?
  - What are you responsible for?
- c. Have you completed forms from the Census Bureau for [government name]?
  - If so, which ones?
  - Have you completed any other government forms?

**2. Typical response process for completing forms**

- a. Do the forms come directly to you?
- b. Do you have access to all of the information requested on the forms?
  - [If no] What don't you have access to?
- c. Who else must provide you information?
  - How do you communicate with them?
  - What do you provide them with to complete their information (copy of the form, copy of the instruction sheet, an e-mail request for the data, a telephone request for the data, etc.)?
- d. What tasks must be completed before you can complete the forms (completion of the CAFR, audits, other)?
- e. Do the forms need to be reviewed by a supervisor or other staff member before being sent to the Census Bureau?
- f. Have you ever had to call the Census Bureau for clarification about certain items in form(s) (F-25, F-28, F-29, F-32)?
  - [If yes] Which ones?
- g. How easy/difficult is it to meet the questionnaire deadline?
  - [If difficult] Why is it difficult to meet the questionnaire deadline?
- h. How easy/difficult would you say the survey process was for you?
  - [If difficult] Why is the survey process difficult for you?

**3. Issues with past forms**

- a. In the past, what have been some of the most troublesome items to gather?
- b. And what have been some of the most time consuming items to report?
- c. Are there any specific data requests you've received in the past that have been confusing?
  - [If yes] Do you remember what these items were?

- d. In the past, what have been some of the easiest items to gather? Why?

## **Part B – Testing of Finance Questions**

Now I'd like to discuss a handful of specific data items.

**4. Property taxes** – All taxes on property, real or personal. Report collections during the fiscal year from all levies for all funds of your government, and its agencies.

- a. Do you use the term 'property tax'? If not, what term do you use?
- b. What types of properties does your government tax?
- c. How are property taxes categorized in your books?
- d. x
- e. Do you have different categories of Property taxes? If so, please describe what each one is.
- f. (Applicable to F-71) Do you have a consolidated line on your books for property tax or would you have to calculate multiple lines in order to get to a consolidated figure? If the latter, how much time would that take?
- g. (Applicable to F-71) Does this government location collect the property taxes, or is there another agency doing this?
- h. (If another agency, applicable to F-71) Do you have access to the amount collected by this separate agency? What would you have to do in order to get this figure? How much time would it take to gather this information?
- i. (Applicable to F-71) Do you collect property taxes on behalf of another government? How is this recorded in your books? Do you have the amount collected for other governments separated? If not, would you be able to separate it? If you were asked to report 'Property Taxes' would you include the amounts you collected for other agencies in this figure?
- j. Does the term 'levies' relate to your property taxes? If so, how? If not, are you familiar with this term? Is there a similar term that you use? How would you define the term 'levies'?
- k. What is your fiscal year?
- l. Would you be able to include levies for debt service, pension funds and other funds or purposes when reporting this figure?
- m. Now that we've discussed Property Taxes, I would like to show you the question that we ask on our forms. How would you go about calculating the figure for this question?
- n. Where do you need to go in your records to get this figure?
  - [If not going to records] Where do you get this information from?
- o. Do you have suggestions on how to improve this question or is it fine as is?

## **5. Streets and Highways**

- a. Does your government get funding for any of its streets or highways?
- b. What does (government name) include in streets and highways?
- c. Where does (government name) get funding from?

- d. Are federal sources direct or pass-through from state? If pass-through, does the state add money?
- e. Would you be able to report the amount of funding you received from other local governments to build/maintain streets and highways?
  - What about funding from the State?
  - What about funding from the Federal Government?
  - Do you receive funding from other sources besides local, State, and Federal governments? Please explain.
- f. What are the terms you use in your books to record this funding?
- g. Is this funding listed in one place or in multiple places in your books? If in multiple, why? What are those lines called?
- h. Are the terms 'streets and highways' inclusive of the roadways in your government that receive funding? Are there others?
- i. Besides receiving funding, are there are other means of your streets or highways generating revenue?
- j. If you were asked to provide a consolidated value for funding/revenue for streets and highways, what would you have to do? Walk me through those calculations. How long would it take to calculate this figure?
- k. Would you be able to report the amount of funding you received from other local governments to build/maintain streets and highways?
  - What about funding from the State?
  - What about funding from the Federal Government?
  - Do you receive funding from other sources besides local, State, and Federal governments? Please explain.
- l. What funding, if anything, could you report for streets and highways? (Show F-28 question) How would you go about calculating the figure for this question?
- m. Where do you need to go in your records to get this figure?
  - [If not going to records] Where do you get this information from?
- n. Do you have suggestions on how to improve this question or is it fine as is?

## **6. Water Supply and Sewage**

- a. Who provides the water supply in (location area)?
- b. Who provides the sewage services in (location area)?
- c. (If government provides both services) Are the water supply and sewage services provided for separately or combined in your books?
- d. (If combined in books) Are these revenue streams and expenses distinguishable in your books?
- e. (If combined) What would you need to do in order to separate water from sewage? How much time would it take you to separate those figures? If we were requesting them separately, how likely are you to take the necessary time to separate those figures?
- f.
- g. (If not combined) How is revenue/funding from your water supply listed in your books? What does that figure include?

- h. (If not combined) How is revenue/funding from sewage listed in your books? What does that include?
- i. What terminology are you using?
- j. Would you be able to report the amount of funding you received from other local governments to build/maintain water supply?
  - What about funding from the State?
  - What about funding from the Federal Government?
  - Do you receive funding/revenue for the water supply from any other sources besides local, State, and Federal?
- k. Would you be able to report the amount of funding you received from other local governments to build/maintain sewage?
  - What about funding from the State?
  - What about funding from the Federal Government?
  - Do you receive funding/revenue for sewage from any other sources besides local, State, and Federal?

(Show them the question) What would you have to do in order to report a figure for this question? Where would you go in your books for this figure?

  - Would you have to do any calculations? How long would it take you to report this figure?
- l. Do you have suggestions on how to improve this question or is it fine as is?

## **7. Natural Resources**

- a. What does the phrase 'natural resources' mean to your government?
  - What services would you include in natural resources?
  - What services would you exclude from natural resources?
- b. How do you list these natural resources in your books? Are they listed separately or are they consolidated?
- c. What terminology are you using? How are these natural resources referred to in your books?
- d. Would you be able to report the amount of funding you received from other local governments to build/maintain natural resources?
  - What about funding from the State?
  - What about funding from the Federal Government?
  - Are you receiving funding from natural resources from any other sources besides local, State or Federal?
- e. (Show the question) How would you report this figure?
- f. Do you have to perform any calculations, if so what?
- g. How long would it take you to report this figure?
- h. Do you have suggestions on how to improve this question or is it fine as is?

## **8. Topic TBD**

## **9. Topic TBD**

## **10. Topic TBD**

### **Part C – Wrap Up**

- 11.** Overall, how could the Census make the survey process easier for you?
- 12.** How would you prefer submitting your survey answers?
  - a. Paper questionnaire? Web Survey? Excel Spreadsheet? Raw data?
- 13.** (If chronic non responder) What would motivate you to return the questionnaire to us?
- 14.** (If government has responded in the past) What motivates you to return the questionnaire to us?
- 15.** How long would it take you to collect this information that we just discussed?
- 16.** Any other comments/questions?

**Thank you for your help!**