SUPPORTING STATEMENT – PART A
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
Research Proposal and Project Management System
OMB Control No. 0607

A. Justification

1. Necessity of the Information Collection

The U.S. Census Bureau through its network of Census Research Data Centers (RDCs) supports and encourages research activity using Census Bureau microdata to improve Census Bureau programs. The RDCs provide access to researchers, federal agencies, and other institutions meeting the requirements of Title 13 United States Code, Section 23(c) to non-publicly available Census Bureau data files. The Center for Economic Studies operates the RDC system on behalf of the Census Bureau.

The objective of the Center for Economic Studies (CES) and the Research Data Centers (RDCs) is to increase the utility and quality of Census Bureau data products. The external research program supported by CES and the RDCs increases the quality and utility of Census data in several ways. First, access to microdata encourages knowledgeable researchers to become familiar with Census data products and Census collection methods. More importantly, providing qualified researchers access to confidential microdata enables research projects that would not be possible without access to respondent-level information. This increases the value of data that has been collected. Access to the microdata also allows for data linking not possible with aggregates, both cross-survey linkages and longitudinal linkages. These linkages leverage the value of preexisting data. Creative use of microdata can address important policy questions without the need for additional data collections.

The Census Bureau operates a network of Research Data Centers (RDCs) at a dozen universities and research institutions across the country. These RDCs operate under joint project agreements with either a single institution or a consortium of institutions that provide space for researchers to access confidential Census Bureau data and other data provided by a variety of government and commercial sources under secure, controlled conditions that ensures compliance with Census Bureau data stewardship policies. The RDCs operate as an enterprise asset designed to facilitate external researcher access to confidential microdata and to foster collaboration between external and internal Census Bureau researchers.

Access to confidential data at an RDC by either external or internal researchers requires preparation and submission of a research proposal to CES by an individual or team of researchers. The proposal submission, review and approval process as well as project tracking is managed with an Internet based application called the CES Research Proposal and Project Management System (CMS). The CMS consists of several modules for accepting information, processing, storage, updating, and reporting.

Preliminary Proposal

Researchers who wish to develop a proposal to conduct research at one of the Census Bureau's Research Data Centers (RDC) initially contact the RDC administrator at the center where the research will be conducted. The researcher discusses the proposed project with the administrator to determine whether the research fits with the Bureau's mission, is feasible, and is likely to provide benefits to Census Bureau programs under Title 13, Chapter 5 of the U.S. Code. The researcher registers as a user with CES by opening an account through the Center's website (www.ces.census.gov). All researchers must have a user account in order to submit preliminary and final proposals to CES.

Working closely with the RDC administrator, researchers develop a preliminary research proposal that includes information about the researcher(s), RDC location(s) where the research will be carried out, purpose of the research, funding source, requested datasets, desired software, a brief narrative description of the research project and proposed benefits to the Census Bureau. The researcher enters this information via the CES on-line proposal management system accessible on the CES website.

Once a preliminary proposal has been submitted, the RDC administrator reviews it and advises the researcher of any suggestions for improvement.. The administrator must approve the preliminary proposal before the researcher can submit a final proposal to CES.

Final Proposal

The final proposal consists of three separate documents in Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF): (1) Abstract of the proposal, (2) Project description (full proposal), and (3) Statement of benefits to the Census Bureau. The submitter uploads the final documents to the CES management system via his or her user account and submits for Census Review by clicking on the Submit link button. This locks the project entry to prevent further edits or document uploads.

Document length varies by type. The abstract is limited to one page, the proposal narrative is limited to fifteen pages single-spaced or thirty pages double spaced, and the benefits statement can range from five to as much as twelve pages at the submitter's discretion.

Method of Collection

User Account.

Individuals create a user account on the CES Project Management System by visiting the CES website (www.ces.census.gov/index/php) and click on the "Register" link on the front page. A template appears which requests contact information from the respondent, including name, mailing address, email address, telephone, professional affiliation, and citizenship. Some fields are required and others are voluntary. The information is retained in the system database and periodically modified by authorized CES staff when needed for activating the user's status on an

approved research project. Users can update their contact information in their account at any time via a secure userid and password.

Research Project Information Template.

Individuals with valid user accounts may create a research project entry in the system by clicking on the link "Start a New Proposal." This action opens a template where the user enters required information about a research project he or she wishes to carry out at a Census Bureau Research Data Center (RDC). The first page consists of a six-item prerequisite checklist to which the user must agree before being allowed to proceed to the next page. The second page requests the following information: project title, requested duration in months, funding source, Research Data Center, research personnel (selected from a list of current user accounts), brief project description, requested research datasets supplied by Census, research datasets supplied by filer, proposed benefits (from checklist of 13 permitted) and a text box for additional information the filer wishes to include. The filer clicks on a Continue button to move to a verification page. The filer can reset the form contents at any time. The filer then verifies the entered information and saves the project information to the database. The system assigns a project number, and sets the project's status to NEW.

 Research Proposal Documents.

- Abstract - A one-page document that summarizes the project's objectives, describes requested data, and lists proposed benefits to the Census Bureau.

- Project Narrative - Describes in detail the research question(s) to be addressed, Census Bureau and researcher supplied datasets to be used, a description of the research design (methodology, hypotheses, statistical models), expected duration and outcomes, source of funding, and a list of references cited in the text.

- Benefits Statement - Known formally as the Predominant Purpose Statement (PPS), this document is generated in draft form by the system. It is populated with some standard language, project title, Principle Investigator's name, preselected benefits, and a list of requested Census Bureau datasets. This document is editable by the submitter, primarily to expand upon the narrative statements associated with each proposed benefit.

- Annual Progress Report – Required for approved projects of three or more years in duration. Consists of a brief description of progress to date.

- Post Project Certification - This document is submitted following completion of the project and summarizes the project's findings in terms of benefits to the Census Bureau. It resembles the Predominant Purpose Statement in form and content except that it describes how and whether the project's proposed benefits were achieved. Census Bureau staff review this document and either certify it or send it back to the submitter for revision.

Authorization

This collection is authorized by Title 13, United States Code, Section 23(c).

2. <u>Needs and Uses</u>

Information quality is an integral part of the pre-dissemination review of the information disseminated by the Census Bureau (fully described in the Census Bureau's Information Quality Guidelines). Information quality is also integral to the information collections conducted by the Census Bureau and is incorporated into the clearance process required by the Paperwork Reduction Act.

<u>Census Bureau</u>

The best means by which the Census Bureau can check on the quality of the data it collects, edits, and tabulates is to make its micro records available in a controlled, secure environment to sophisticated users who, by employing the micro records in the course of rigorous analysis, will uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the micro records. Each set of observations is the end result of dozens upon dozens of decision rules covering definitions, classifications, coding procedures, processing rules, editing rules, disclosure rules, and so on. The validity and consequences of all these decision rules only become evident when the Census Bureau's micro databases are tested in the course of analysis. Exposing to the light of research the conceptual and processing assumptions that are embedded in the Census Bureau's micro databases constitutes a core element in the Census Bureau's commitment to quality. CES and the RDCs conduct, facilitate, and support microdata research.

<u>Government Users</u>

Access to confidential anonymous microdata on businesses, households and individuals at Census Bureau Research Data Centers assists other Federal agencies in carrying out their authorized mission with respect to better informing policy makers, the public, and internal management on economic, social, and environmental issues of national, regional and local importance. Research projects at RDCs have been carried out by researchers from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Environmental Protection Agency, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Institute of Standards and Technology, National Science Foundation, Small Business Administration, Federal Reserve Board of Governors, and Federal Reserve Banks of Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Kansas City, and San Francisco.

<u>Other Users</u>

The vast majority of users are academic research faculty at major U.S. universities or other types of research institutions such as the Urban Institute, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Rand Corporation, Public Policy Institute of California, National Bureau of Economic Research, and Resources for the Future. Scientific research typically results in papers

presented at scientific conferences and published in peer reviewed academic journals, working paper series, monographs, and technical reports. The scientific community at large benefits from the additions to knowledge resulting from research with Census Bureau microdata. Results inform both scientific theory and public policy.

3. Use of Information Technology

The CMS is a fully automated system that collects, manages, and disseminates information using cutting edge Web application tools and data management processes. All users interact with the system through an interface on the World Wide Web. Within the fully automated capabilities of the system we are constantly investigating ways of simplifying data entry, collection, and management by users. An important ongoing objective is to collect and collate content information on research proposals, proposal reviews, decision information, reports, and project output in real time in order to eliminate upload of previously prepared documents. All data and information will be entered via designed templates which can then be assembled in desires ways to produce documents of all types and for a variety of purposes.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

No other system is known to exist that collects, tracks, and processes the information contained in the CMS. The application was created specifically to accommodate the needs and business processes associated with the Census Bureau's external research program in the Research Data Center Network. The system is sufficiently comprehensive and scalable that Census Bureau executive staff has approved its adaptation and use with all internal Census Bureau research and production projects, and it would replace an older system used to track internal projects. In that sense the CMS would reduce duplication by combining all Census Bureau project tracking into a single database and management system.

5. Minimizing Burden

Small businesses or other small entities are not asked to report information.

6. Consequences of Less Frequent Collection

The Census Bureau's research program would not be viable without this data collection effort. It is the most efficient and least costly means of permitting academic, government, and other research scientists to register with the Census Bureau as potential researchers and proposal reviewers. All data collection is conducted on a voluntary basis and according to the schedules of the users. There can be no less frequent means of collecting the information. Proposals are accepted by the system and processed on a continuous basis so that decisions can be made about the utility of the proposed research to Census Bureau data programs in the shortest time possible consistent with established review criteria and agreements with external data providers. Less frequent collection and processing of research proposals would increase the average time to reach a decision. Since adoption of a "rolling" proposal submission and review process, the average decision duration has been reduced by one-half.

7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances.

8. Consultations Outside the Agency

On December 15, 2010 the Census Bureau published a notice in the Federal Register (Volume 75, No 240, pages 78212-13) inviting the general public and other federal agencies to comment on plans to submit this request. No formal comments were received.

The Center for Economic Studies holds regular informal consultations with RDC partners about the functionality of CMS and routinely solicits and accepts suggestions from internal and external users on ways to streamline or otherwise improve the system's operability.

9. Paying Respondents

No payments or gifts are given to holders of user accounts in the system.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality

User account holders are advised of the site's Privacy Statement on several different pages of the site. A link to the Privacy Statement appears on the log in page for returning users and on the registration page where new users create their user account. Data collected by CMS is treated as confidential. All personal identifiers are protected in accordance with the Privacy Act and Census Bureau data stewardship policies on information security management (DS-007), respondent identification (DS-016), and unauthorized browsing (DS-018).

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

No sensitive questions are asked.

12. Estimate of Hour Burden

The number of proposals entered into the system in a given year can fluctuate. Some proposals never pass from preliminary to final status, mainly because the filer does not follow through. The following figures are based on proposal submissions from calendar years 2002 through 2010. On average a filer (proposal submitter) will submit a proposal no more than once every three years.

- Type of submission: External research proposal
- Annual number of submissions: 60
- Average annual burden estimate: 63 hours
- Total burden hours: 3,780 hours

Using an average hourly wage rate for an economist of $46.31 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) the average annual dollar cost per project is $2,918.

13. Estimate of Cost Burden

It is not expected that respondents will incur any cost in establishing user accounts or in submitting proposals to the system. The information requested is of the type and scope normally carried in agency records and no special hardware or software is necessary to provide answers to the information collection. Therefore, users are not expected to incur any capital or startup costs or systems maintenance cost is providing information to the system.

14. Cost to Federal Government

We expect the total cost to the Federal Government to aver between $180,000 and $200,000 per year for Fiscal 2012, 2013, and 2014. These figures are based on required staff resources to maintain and use the system for its intended purposes.

15. Reason for Change in Burden

The increase in burden is attributable to the information collection being submitted as new.

16. Project Schedule

The data provided by users to the CMS is received on an ongoing basis and is not subject to any schedule. Users provide information voluntarily and at their discretion when creating user accounts and when submitting research proposals or other documents such as working papers, technical notes, or post project certification statements. The system is accessible on a 24/7 basis as an Internet application, except for periods of scheduled maintenance or unexpected interruptions of service.

17. Request to Not Display Expiration Date

The expiration date of OMB approval will be displayed on the information collection screens.

18. Exceptions to the Certification

There are no exceptions.

19. SIC Codes Affected

Not applicable.