

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the Census Bureau's plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire research (OMB number 0607-0725). We plan to conduct debriefing interviews to test the impact of a letter-only mail strategy for the 2012 Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed Persons (SBO). The SBO provides the only comprehensive, regularly collected source of information on selected economic and demographic characteristics for businesses and their individual owners by gender, ethnicity, race, and veteran status.

The SBO adopted a web push strategy for the first time with respondents in 2013. For this survey cycle, the SBO contacted respondents via letter requesting online response to the survey. Respondents who did not report online after the initial mailing were contacted two more times. At time one (first follow-up), two-thirds of the remaining nonrespondents received a letter requesting electronic reporting, while the other third received a paper form to complete and return via mail. At time two (second follow-up), the two groups received the alternative contact strategy (i.e., those who received a letter at time one received a form at time two and vice versa). However, it should be noted that a group of respondents were previously identified as reporting electronically to the Economic Census in 2012 were excluded from this follow-up procedure and only received follow-up letters; these respondents did not receive a form unless they requested one.

From December 2013 through March 2014, the Response Improvement Research Staff (RIRS) will conduct one round of debriefing interviews with up to 100 business respondents across the United States. SBO staff will provide us with a list of businesses from which we will recruit. Interview cases will be selected based on response mode (i.e., paper vs. web), apparent usability issues (e.g., breakoffs) as identified in paradata, variance from the 2012 Economic Census response mode in cases where the same respondents responded to both, and nonresponse. The interviews will take place over the phone. During interviews, we will be investigating respondents' and nonrespondents' reactions to the mailout materials, the usability of the internet instrument, and the relationship between the survey response process and choice of mode. Interviews will focus on respondents' preferences for paper versus electronic modes, reasons for nonresponse, and the impact of the appearance and content of the web-push letters. During interviews we will be testing two versions of the SBO form. Half of the interviews will focus on the full version of the survey form and half of the interviews will focus on a "short form." The short form is a shortened version of the survey in which most of the owner-specific demographic questions and nearly all the business-oriented questions have been removed. A draft protocol has been included with this letter.

After businesses are recruited, participants will receive confirmation letters about their appointments upon request via fax. Participants will be informed that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be seen only by Census Bureau or special sworn employees involved in the research project. We will not be providing monetary incentives to participants in this study.

Subject area specialists from the SBO staff may participate as observers of the phone interviews as able. We will audio-record some of the interviews with the participants' permission, to aid researchers in accurately reporting findings and recommendations.

We estimate that it will be necessary to interview one respondent at each business. We estimate the length of the interviews at a maximum of twenty minutes (100 cases X 20 minutes per case = 16.67 hours). Additionally, to recruit respondents we expect to make up to 5 phone contacts per completed case. The recruiting calls are expected to last on average two minutes per call (5 attempted phone calls per completed case X 100 cases X 2 minutes = 33.33 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for this project is 50 hours (16.67 hours for recruiting + 33.33 hours for interviews).

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is:

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