

**ECONOMIC CENSUS
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE – BUSINESSES**

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

A. Purpose of meeting: We are going to talk about some of the information requests from the Federal, State and local governments that businesses must deal with today. We are going to talk about your experiences and get your opinions about these different requests. Let me assure you once again that this is not a sales meeting of any kind. I don't have anything to sell you. This is a form of research conducted with members of the local business community and all I'm interested in are your opinions.

B. About this focus group session

1. Form of market research, not selling anything
2. Discussion will last about 2 hours
3. Audio/Video Recording
4. One-way mirror; associates viewing, notes may come in
5. All comments will be kept anonymous and confidential
6. Have courage of convictions; don't let group sway you
7. No right or wrong answers, only your opinion
8. Don't have to raise hands; but speak one at a time
9. Work for independent market research company
10. Turn off cell phones

C. Respondent introduction

1. Name
2. Type and location of business
3. Years in business
4. Number of employees
5. Ice breaker

II. Government Reporting Requirements (20 minutes)

- A. Now I would like to turn to the topic of tonight's discussion: the requests for business information you receive from the government.
1. What requests for information about your business do you receive from the government?
 - a. Federal, State, local government. Other organizations?
 - b. Approximately how many of these requests/forms do you typically have to complete each year? (How many are in your inbox right now?)
 2. How easy or difficult is it to respond to these information requests/requirements?
 - a. What is your biggest obstacle in complying with the requests/requirements?
 - b. What could be done to make the task easier?
 3. How do you typically submit your information – online on computer, paper forms or other ways such as mobile devices or tablets?
 - a. How do you feel about completing these requests online?
 - i. Is online submission easier or more difficult than paper submission?
 - ii. Do you have any concerns (security/confidentiality) submitting your data online?
 - iii. Do you face any technical issues when completing the forms online?
 - b. Do you prefer to do these things online (mobile/desktop/etc.) or would you rather use paper forms? Why?
 4. Can someone tell me about the process they go through in completing a typical government request for information?
 - a. Is it something you attend to as soon as it arrives or do you wait and complete it at a later date and time? How do you determine its priority?
 - b. Does it require more than one of your employees/co-workers to complete the request?
 - i. When more than one person is involved, how do you go about coordinating your response to the request?
 - ii. Is the process different if you are completing the request online vs. a paper form? Explain the process
 - c. Where do you turn to for help or answers to any questions you have regarding the request?
 - d. Do you or your employees answer the requests or do you have an external source such as an accountant or bookkeeper handle them?
 - i. If you use a third-party, how do they submit the forms (paper or online)?

5. Are you ever unclear about the legitimacy of these types of requests (is this a real form)?
 - a. What is it that makes you skeptical about the legitimacy?
 - b. What gives you reassurance that request is something legitimate and important?

III. Awareness and Perceptions of the Economic Census (35 minutes)

- A. What is the Economic Census? (Assess group's unaided awareness)
- B. Who conducts the Economic Census (Dept. of Commerce; Census Bureau)?
 1. How often is it conducted?
 2. Do you recall completing the 2012 Economic Census?
 - a. What was that experience like? (Easy/difficult and why?)
 - b. How did you complete the 2012 Economic Census (paper/online)?
 3. What is the purpose of the Economic Census?
 - a. What is the data used for?
 4. Why should businesses participate?
 - a. Is it important to complete the Economic Census? Why/why not?
 5. How do businesses benefit from data?
 - a. Are you aware that the data/results are available to your business?
 6. Are there consequences for not completing the forms?
 - a. Are you aware that businesses are required by law to complete the Census?
 - i. What would happen if you didn't complete and return the forms?
 - b. How secure do you think the information you send to the Census Bureau is?

(DISTRIBUTE AND READ STATEMENT EXPLAINING THE ECONOMIC CENSUS TO GROUP.)

“The Economic Census is the U.S. Government’s official five-year measure of American business and the economy. It is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and response is required by law. Forms go out to about 4 million businesses, including large, medium and small companies representing all U.S. locations and industries. Respondents are asked to provide a range of operational and performance data for their companies. As part of the U.S. Census Bureau’s mission to measure America’s economy, the next Economic Census will be conducted for the year ending December 2017.”

7. What is your reaction to this statement?
 - a. Does it clearly explain what the Economic Census is? Why/why not?
 - b. Are there parts of this statement you particularly like/dislike?

8. Why should businesses participate?
 - a. Is it important to complete the Economic Census? Why/why not?
 9. How do businesses benefit from data/results?
 - a. Are you aware that the data/results are available to your business?
 10. Are there consequences for not completing the forms?
 - a. Were you aware that businesses are required by law to complete the Census?
 - i. What would happen if you didn't complete and return the forms?
- C. Beginning with the 2017 Economic Census, all reporting will be done online, no paper forms will be mailed to businesses. What is your reaction to completing the Economic Census electronically?
1. Do you have any concerns or foresee any problems completing the 2017 Economic Census online?
- D. Next I would like to get your reactions to some different messages that could be used by the Census Bureau to encourage business people to respond to the 2017 Economic Census.

(ASK FOLLOWING FOR FIRST MESSAGE. THEN REPEAT FOR EACH MESSAGE.)

1. Message communication/main point
 - a. What is the main point of the theme?
 - b. How do you feel about the message? How important is this message to you?
2. Other points communicated
 - a. What other points are being communicated in the theme?
 - b. Are these important or meaningful to you?
3. Initial reactions to the theme
 - a. Likes/dislikes
4. Is this a believable message for the Census Bureau to make?
 - a. Why/why not?
5. Is this an appropriate message for the Census Bureau to make?
 - a. Why/why not?
6. Is there anything confusing or difficult to understand about the message? If so, what?
7. Would this message this message help motivate you to complete the Economic Census?

- D. When you have completed government requests for information online, what were the actual websites like? That is, are they easy to use?
1. Do they provide clear instructions as to what it is you need to do?
 - a. Are you able to get help if you need it?
 - b. How easy are the sites to navigate and accomplish what you need to do?
 2. Are there certain websites that you have found are particularly ease to use? Which ones and what is it about them that you like?
 3. What are your expectations for the 2017 Economic Census website?
 - a. What features or functionality do you want it to have?
- E. Since the 2017 Economic Census is moving away from paper forms to all online reporting, it is important that businesses be informed of this change. Next I want to show you a sample of what may be mailed out to help you be prepared for the 2017 Economic Census.

(HAND OUT MAILING MATERIAL, ASK RESPONDENTS TO TAKE MINUTE TO LOOK IT OVER)

1. What is your initial reaction to the material/packet?
 - a. Is it clear where this material comes from/does it look official? Why?
 - b. How likely are you to save this as something important? (i.e., not throw it out).
 - c. Earlier we talked about the legitimacy of requests like this, does this material convey legitimacy? Why? / Why not?
 - i. What could been done to make it give you the reassurance of legitimacy?
2. Was it clear to you that you need to complete the forms online?
 - a. Where would you go to do that?
 - b. What is your reaction to completing the forms online?
3. What is your reaction to the fact that this information is being sent to you in paper form?
 - a. What if they sent you the same information via an email?
 - i. Do letters and emails convey the same level of importance and legitimacy of the request? Explain.
 - ii. Would an email get your attention?
 - iii. **(IF NO)** What would the email need to say or look like in order to get your attention and reassure you of the legitimacy of the request?

4. As a result of receiving the material what would your first steps be?
 - a. Set it aside for later?
 - b. Pass it on to someone else?
 - i. Who? Someone in your firm? Someone outside, such as an accountant?
 - c. How likely are you to file online?
5. There are a number of possible ways of communicating when businesses need to have completed and submitted their forms. One way is to state that the forms must be submitted by a specific deadline date. Another way is to say that businesses have a window between, let's say February 10 and June 10 to complete and submit their forms. Which of these two approaches would you be most likely to respond to?
 - a. Why do you say that?
 - b. What makes one approach more effective than the other?

IV. Where to Go for Help (15 minutes)

- A. If you needed help completing the 2017 Economic Census online where would you go?
 1. The instructions on the form
 - a. Call a help desk
 - b. Go online
 2. What kind of help would you need on a form like this?

I would now like to show you an example of a website where you could get assistance to fill out your Economic Census forms. We're only going to look at the home page, but the site would contain a lot more information.

(SHOW SAMPLE)

1. What are your initial reactions to this website?
 - a. What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
2. Does it look like it offers useful information? Assistance?
 - a. What specific features stand out?
 - a. What additional information or features do you want to see?
3. Does it seem like it would be easy to navigate and find what you are looking for? How does it compare to other help sites?
5. Does this meet your expectations of what an online help site should offer? Why/why not?

B. I would now like to walk you through the steps to respond to the 2017 Economic Census.

(SHOW RESPONDENTS SERIES OF SCREENS/WALK THROUGH STEPS THAT LEAD TO ELECTRONIC REPORTING PAGE)

1. What is your reaction to the process?
 - a. What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
 - b. Now after seeing the website and the process, how likely would you be to complete your Economic Census?
 - c. What more could be done, if anything, to make you more likely to complete your Economic Census?

V. Reaction to business.census.gov Website/"Snapshots"/Business Development Tool (25 minutes)

A. When you are filling out your form or after completion, you might want to learn more about the Economic Census – what the Census is for, where your information goes, etc. The Census Bureau has a website that provides this kind of information, which I'm going to show you now. I am going to show you the home page of the site that was used for the last Economic Census in 2012, along with a few its features, and get your reaction. Again, keep in mind that the site contains a lot more information than what we have time to show you.

(SHOW BUSINESS.CENSUS.GOV HOME PAGE)

1. What are your initial reactions to this website?
 - a. What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
 2. Does it look like it offers useful information?
 3. What other features, if any, would you like to have available on this website?
 4. When you want more information, you will be able to access this website directly from the business help site (we just reviewed.) How likely are you to visit or use this website? Why?
 5. What changes would you make for the next Census in 2017?
- B. The Census Bureau has some ways for packaging data from the Economic Census that allow respondents to easily see the value and usefulness of what they report and how they can access it. I am going to show you just two of those way **(PRESENT "SNAPSHOTS" AND THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOL AND GET REACTIONS.)**
1. What is your initial reaction?
 - a. What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
 - b. Where would you expect to see this?
 - c. Is this something you would expect to see from the Census Bureau?

- d. What other information would you find interesting?
2. Would this information be something that you would use?
 - a. Is this something you might share or pass on to others?

VI. The Economic Census Name (5 minutes)

- A. We have spent a lot of time talking about what the Economic Census is and why it is conducted. But we haven't talked about the name – Economic Census. From what you have learned tonight, is “Economic Census” the name that best describes what it is?
 1. Are there other names that would be more appropriate and better describe it?
 2. **(SHOW POSSIBLE NAMES AND GET REACTIONS ONE AT A TIME)**
There are other names that have been suggested:
 - a. What is your reaction to this name?
 - i. What do you like/dislike about it?
 - ii. How well does it describe what the Census is?

VII. Closing – Group Assignment (10 minutes)

- A. Now that you know a little more about the 2017 Economic Census and some of the things that are being planned, I would like you as a group to come up with a list of the top five things that you feel the Census Bureau should do to maximize the success of the 2017 Economic Census.
 1. These recommendations could be: what is the most important message they should communicate to business people like yourselves? What do they need to tell you? What do they need to show you? Or how should they contact you?