

**ECONOMIC CENSUS
ROUND 2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE
SMALL, MEDIUM AND LARGE COMPANIES**

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. First name
2. Type of business (but do not reveal name)
3. Years in business
4. Number of employees
5. Ice breaker

II. Government Reporting Requirements (15 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 (20 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 could/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 DESCRIBING THE ECONOMIC CENSUS)

- 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 could/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?
 2. If someone does need assistance with a reporting process that requires the computer and is 100% online, what type of help may be required?
 - a. Where would people go to get this help?
- 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?

IV. 2017 Economic Census Mailings (30 minutes)

We're now going to walk through the details of the 2017 Economic Census program.

- A. Timing and Due Date: The next Economic Census will be conducted in the spring of 2018 for the year ending December 31, 2017. **(DESCRIBE SCHEDULE AND SHOW TIMELINE VISUAL)**
1. What is your initial reaction to this schedule?
 2. How does this timing work with your "closing the books" for 2017 (even if your fiscal year doesn't end Dec 31)? Explain.
 3. Does this timing coordinate with preparation of your 2017 tax returns? Why or why not?
 4. With online reporting opening _____ and a _____ due date, when in this time period are you more likely to complete the Census? (Get it off my desk quickly or wait until last minute.) Please explain.
 5. Response is required by law. Does knowing this change your response to the previous question?
 6. How does this schedule compare to the last Economic Census in 2012-2013?
- B. Mailing #1: Next we'll look at the first mailing you will receive from the Census Bureau, to be sent out _____. Please keep in mind this is a sample packet, still in development, and we're looking for your feedback to make is as effective as possible. **(DISTRIBUTE SAMPLE MAILING PACKET)**

1. (Before opening) What is your initial reaction to the mailing envelope?
 - a. Is it clear where this material comes from/does it look official? Why? Please cite specific elements (words, phrases, visuals) on the front.
 - 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 be done to increase reassurance of legitimacy?
 - d. Does the size of the envelope affect your reactions? Would a smaller #10 business size envelope give you the same impressions? Why or why not?

(OPEN AND REVIEW MAILING PACKET to include e.g. official letter, instructions for response preparation, examples of how response data is used, information about accessing online reporting, etc.)

2. What is your initial reaction to the overall contents of the packet?
 - a. Is it what you expected? Why or why not?
 - b. Does it provide the kind of information you would be looking for?
 - i. Is there other information that you would like to have? If so, what?
 - c. Is it the right amount of information? Too much? Not enough?
 - d. Do the contents convey legitimacy? Why or why not?
 - e. Do the contents make you more or less motivated to respond to the Economic Census?
3. **(REVIEW EACH COMPONENT OF PACKET)** Ask the following for each:
 - a. What is your overall reaction to _____ ?
 - b. Does it provide helpful information?
 - c. Does it convey legitimacy? Why or why not?
 - d. What part stands out as the most positive/impactful?
 - e. What part would you change? How would you improve it?
 - f. Does this make you more or less motivated to respond to the Economic Census?
4. As a result of receiving these materials 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. Visit a specific website?
 - d. Other steps?

- C. **Mailing #2:** Now we'll look at the second mailing you will receive from the Census Bureau, to be sent out _____. Please keep in mind this is a sample packet, still in development, and we're looking for your feedback to make it as effective as possible.

(DISTRIBUTE SAMPLE MAILING PACKET)

1. (Before opening) What is your initial reaction to the mailing envelope?
 - a. Is it clear where this material comes from/does it look official? Why? Please cite specific elements (words, phrases, visuals) on the front.
 - 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 increase reassurance of legitimacy?
 - d. Does the fact that this is the second mailing you've received affect your reactions – If so, how?

(OPEN AND REVIEW MAILING PACKET to include e.g. official letter, instructions for response preparation, examples of how response data is used, information about accessing online reporting, etc.)

2. What is your initial reaction to the overall contents of the packet?
 - a. Is it what you expected? Why or why not?
 - b. Does it provide the kind of information you would be looking for?
 - c. Is it the right amount of information?
 - d. Do the contents convey legitimacy? Why or why not?
 - e. Do the contents make you more or less motivated to respond to the Economic Census?
3. **(REVIEW EACH COMPONENT OF PACKET)** Ask the following for each:
 - a. What is your overall reaction to _____ ?
 - b. Does it provide helpful information?
 - c. Does it convey legitimacy? Why or why not?
 - d. What part stands out as the most positive/impactful?
 - e. What part would you change? How would you improve it?
 - f. Does this make you more or less motivated to respond to the Economic Census?
4. As a result of receiving these materials 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. Visit a specific website?
- d. Other steps?

V. Online Reporting (25 minutes)

A. 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 FOR ELECTRONIC REPORTING)

1. What is your reaction to the overall process?
 - a. What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
 - b. What do you think of the mailings you received prior to this process?
 - c. Do you think the mailings you received prior to this process were helpful?
 - i. Do you think they will help you prepare for response?
 - ii. Do you think they would make the online reporting process easier?
 - d. What is your assessment of the Help options provided through the process (e.g. help buttons, pop-up windows, help website, etc.)?
 - i. If you needed help with response, would you use these online resources?
 - ii. Would you call the 1-800 # for assistance?
 - iii. Other options for assistance?
 - e. What is your assessment of the “save and print” functionality of the online process?
 - i. Saving your work-in-progress?
 - ii. Archiving your final submission? Is a printed copy required or is PDF archive sufficient?
 - f. Assessment of submission screen (e.g. thank you, invitation for process feedback, invitation to get more information, etc.)
 - g. Assessment of submission receipt/confirmation at end.

VI. Summary Assessment (10 minutes)

- A. Now after seeing the website and the process, how do you feel about completing your Economic Census?
- B. How likely would you be complete the Census in conjunction with your 2017 returns? If you use an outside Accountant/Tax Preparer, would you enlist their help?
- C. What program component or message presented today most motivated you to respond?
- D. What more could be done, if anything, to make you more likely to complete your Economic Census?

- E. **(HAND OUT MESSAGING WORKSHEET)** Ask participants to rate different message points on written sheet. Quick discussion, time permitting.

VII. 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?

VIII. Closing – Group Assignment (5 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?