Business Unit Harmonization Project
Case Study Interview Protocol
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(NOTE: This protocol is a guide – the questions presented here will not necessarily be asked exactly as worded in the protocol or in this order. Not all questions will be asked in every interview.)

Research Questions:

- Does the Industry Reporting Unit (IRU) work for the companies?
    - o Which data items?
    - o Less burdensome than current methods?
- What are the challenges for reporting at the IRU level?
- How do FSAM services interact with the IRU?
- How does the IRU affect mailout operations in each of the surveys? Is the data quality from the mailed IRU on par with the prior reporting units?

Expected Length of Interview: 60 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Protocol
- Consent forms
- Digital recorder
- Copies of most recent survey submissions (for reference)
- Listing of proposed IRUs for the company

General probes that may be used throughout the interview:

- Reflect back on respondent's answer: "you said…"
- In your own words, what is this question asking?
- How did you arrive at this number/answer this question?
- Was this data easy to access?
- What records (if any) did you look at? What line or lines were of interest?
- Specifically, what did you include in this number? What did you exclude?
- Would you consult other people to obtain this answer?

Introduction:

- Explain purpose of meeting: to determine if the Industry Reporting Unit (IRU) project will be helpful, assess challenges to use from the respondents' point of view
- This is not a test of you! We want to understand how you are interpreting this form to make sure we are doing our jobs right and asking questions that can easily be answered.
- As we go through the interview, we will ask both general and specific questions. If at any time a question seems odd to you, please let us know! We encourage all feedback!
- Do we have permission to record our conversation for research purposes? Have respondent sign consent form.

Questions to Ask Respondents:

Respondent Background
- Before we start with more specific questions, I would like to ask you a few questions about this company and your role in it.
- (For each person in the room): What is your formal job title? And, could you tell me a little about your role and responsibilities?

Company Background
- What would you consider to be the main operating activity of this company?
- How many locations are outside the US?
  - What types of locations are you including in this count?
  - What types of activities are done at these locations?
  - Are you including subsidiaries in this count?
- What is your ownership status? Are you domestically owned or foreign owned?

Record Keeping
- Can you tell us how you organize your records, internally? (e.g., by location, business group, product line, function etc.)
- Can you make a list of locations by function?
  - Have you done this before? In what context?
  - How easy or difficult is it to do so?
- What information do you have available for each individual location?

Responding to surveys
- Can you briefly walk us through the process that your company typically undertakes when answering an Economic data based survey?
  - Do you work with other individuals or areas of the company?
  - Do you interact with employees at other locations?
  - What do you need to get from these locations?
  - Do you make contact with EACH establishment or location of the company?

Introduction to IRU concept
Now we'd like to tell you more about the new method of data collection that we are working on. We are investigating collection data at a level according to the business activities that a company engages in; roughly mapped to the NAICS codes that apply to your company (NAICS is the North American Industrial Classification System, and the NAICS codes are used to classify businesses by what they do). We call these new reporting units Individual Reporting Units, or IRUs for short.

Implementing these would be a change from our current practice, where we ask for responses for each individual establishment. Here is a spreadsheet that shows your current reporting units, as well as our attempt to create IRUs for your company. Please take a moment to review these, and then we'd like to ask you a series of questions related to this.

Data Items
Now, we would like to show you questions that appear on Census Bureau surveys. For each question, we would like you to consider how you would compile the information need to answer these questions at both the current data collection levels, as well as at the IRU level.

- What was the employment for the first quarter last year for each reporting unit?

- What was the annual payroll from the last year for each reporting unit?
- What were the revenues/sales for each reporting unit during the past quarter? Past year?
- What were the revenues/sales for each reporting unit by product type during the past quarter? Past year?
- What were the operating expenses for each reporting unit during the past quarter? Past year?
- What are the Net Shipments, manufactured in the U.S., of the current calendar month? Year?
- What are the Total Inventories, warehoused in U.S. in current cost for the calendar month? Year?
- What time period is covered by data provided (Calendar vs Fiscal)?

Follow-up Questions:
- Does your company provide this service/activity in which we have you classified?
- Would you be able to report e-commerce into the business units provided?
    - Are there any characteristics of e-commerce revenue that make it different to report than more traditional revenue? What are they?
    - Would using the business units we discussed make it easier or more difficult to report e-commerce? How so?
- Would you need to involve any other staff in this process of answering any of these questions?
    - If so, which items and what was their role?
- Approximately, how long would it take you (and any other involved staff) to answer these questions, in total?
- How well can the requested data be gathered at the domestic level? Is U.S. only data something they can easily pull acquire from an accounting system?
    - Are there any data items that have overlap between different domestic locations?
    - Are you able to separate into individual locations or would there be double counting?

End/Wrap up
- What are your overall impressions of reporting by IRU?
- How would you compare the process of answering this question at the IRU level, compared with answering it at the establishment level?
    - If needed, easier, more difficult, the same? In what aspects?
- To what degree were the IRUs we chose for your company representative of how your company is organized?
    - Were there any obviously incorrect IRUs that we identified for your company that do not apply? If so, which?
- What general difficulties did you have reporting by IRU?
    - Follow-up: Are these difficulties that you also experienced when reporting by establishment?
- What benefits did you see to reporting by IRU?
    - Follow-up: Are these improvements over the current reporting format, by establishment?
- Do you foresee any problems with reporting by IRU that we haven't yet addressed?
- We are envisioning that we would make custom IRUs for certain companies. Which of these options would you prefer?
    - Census creates the IRUs for you, based on our knowledge of your companies
    - Census and your company work collaboratively to create
    - Your company creates the IRUs and tells Census
    - Why do you prefer this option?

- o Would you work with Census to create custom IRUs, or would you want total control over the IRUs?
- o How much time/effort would you be willing to contribute to the customization of the IRUs?