

**Generic Information Collection Request:  
Usability evaluation for the 2017 Annual Business Survey**

**Request:** 1The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). The Census Bureau plans to conduct pretesting activities for the online 2017 Annual Business Survey (ABS) instrument.

The ABS will be conducted jointly by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Census Bureau for five reference years (2017 – 2021). Title 13 United States Code, Sections 8(b), 131, and 182, Title 42 United States Code, Section 1861-76 (National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended), and Section 505 within the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 authorize this collection. Sections 224 and 225 of Title 13 United States Code requires response from sampled firms. The ABS is a new survey designed to combine Census Bureau firm-level collections to reduce respondent burden, increase data quality, reduce operational costs, and operate more efficiently. The ABS replaces the five-year Survey of Business Owners (SBO) for employer businesses, the Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs (ASE), and the Business R&D and Innovation for Microbusinesses (BRDI-M) surveys.

The ABS will provide data on the status, nature, and scope of minority owned business, R&D activity for small employer businesses (businesses with 1-9 employees), measure new business topics such as innovation and technology, and measure other business and owner characteristics. Estimates will be available for the U.S., states, metropolitan and metropolitan statistical areas, counties, and places. Among other uses, the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) will use results from the ABS to assess business assistance needs and allocate available program resources. Estimates produced on research and development and innovation may be used to compare R&D costs across industries, determine where R&D activity is conducted geographically, and identify the types of businesses with R&D; to contribute to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) system of national accounts; to increase investments in research and development, strengthen education, and encourage entrepreneurship; and to compare business innovation in the United States to that of other countries, including those in the European Union.

The ABS is collected via a self-administered questionnaire using the Census Bureau's online survey reporting system. Respondents are mailed a letter informing them of the requirement to complete the survey and providing them with access information. Paper forms are not available, but respondents can download a PDF worksheet containing the survey questions and instructions.

**Purpose:** The ABS asks questions about the business owner(s) as well as various characteristics about the business. The 2017 ABS will be conducted via a self-administered Web only method for all firms. The data collection instrument requires pretesting to evaluate the instrument prior to its release. In addition, pretesting will help inform user centered design ensuring that key functions are available within the instrument, making it easy for respondents to understand and report. Additional objectives for the evaluation of the online 2017 ABS instrument include the

following:

- Identify areas of the instrument that are problematic for users
- Identify instructions/features that are difficult for users to understand
- Provide recommendations for improvements to the design of the instrument that will enhance its usability

The results from the usability evaluation will be recorded and tabulated and a report produced that outlines the findings of the pretest and recommendations for improvement.

**Population of Interest:** Potential respondents based on sample selection criteria.

**Timeline:** Testing will be conducted from April through May 2018.

**Language:** Testing will be conducted in English only.

**Method:** We will conduct one round of usability interviews with up to 20 respondents in order to evaluate the online instrument. Travel is required for the usability testing.

**Sample:** We plan to conduct a total of 20 interviews. We plan to conduct interviews in the San Diego, CA and Washington, DC metropolitan areas with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of businesses. Since the survey includes many questions that are specific to R&D, we plan to target companies that are expected to perform these types of activities.

**Recruitment:** Participants will be recruited using the sample file from the 2016 ASE. Before beginning the interviews, we will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential under Title 13. The interviews may be recorded (with consent), to facilitate summarization.

**Protocol:** A copy of a draft interview protocol is enclosed. Sessions for the usability evaluation will be conducted in person. Participants will be asked to complete the ABS online instrument. We anticipate all sessions will take less than 60 minutes to complete.

**Use of incentive:** Monetary incentives for participation will not be offered.

Below is a list of materials to be used in the current study:

**Attachment A:** Draft protocol used to outline how the research study will be conducted

**Attachment B:** Consent form to obtain participant consent for participant and recording of the session

**Attachment C:** Instrument screenshots to illustrate features of the instrument that are being evaluated

**Attachment D:** Draft respondent letter to provide login instructions for participant

**Length of interview:** For cognitive interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more

than 60 minutes (20 cases x 60 minutes per case = 20 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 3 minutes per call (5 attempts per phone call per completed case x 20 cases x 3 minutes per case = 5 hours). Thus the estimated burden is 25 hours (20 hours for interviews + 5 hours for recruiting).

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

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