

Generic Information Collection Request: Instrument Debriefings for the 2017 Economic Census

Request: The 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 respondent debriefings for the online 2017 Economic Census instrument.

The Economic Census is a mandatory survey conducted by the Census Bureau every five years. The survey collects data electronically from nearly 4 million businesses (including large, medium and small companies representing all U.S. locations and industries) on a range of operational and performance questions. Data from the survey are used as the official five-year measure of American business and the economy. This survey is collected under the authority of Title 13, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 131. Further information regarding the Economic Census can be found at this website: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/economic-census.html>

Purpose: Historically, data for the Economic Census were collected using paper forms and a downloadable software application accessed from the web. A web application was available starting in 2012 for companies that operated a single location. However, in 2017, the Economic Census will be conducted via a self-administered web-only method for all companies. This change in data collection requires testing to evaluate the instrument. In addition, data gathered from debriefings will help inform user-centered design decisions for the future and ensure that key functions are being utilized as expected and that the instrument is easy for respondents to use for reporting. Additional objectives outlined for the evaluation of the online 2017 Economic Census instrument include the following:

- Evaluate the instrument's performance in terms of efficiency, accuracy, and user satisfaction
- 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

Results from the debriefings will be recorded and a report will be produced that outlines findings and provides recommendations for improvement.

Staff from the Data Collection Methodology & Research Branch within the Economic Statistical Methods Division (ESMD) of the Census Bureau will be conducting debriefing interviews for this testing, with support from staff from the Economy-wide Statistics Division (EWD), and the Economic Management Division (EMD). For this testing, we will interview up to 100 respondents.

Population of Interest: Large, medium and small companies from various U.S. locations and industries.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: The method of research will be telephone debriefing interviews, which are interviews aimed at understanding how a respondent recently reported to a survey. For the purposes of this research, the debriefing questions will be focused on the respondents’ interactions with the data collection instrument. All interviews will be conducted over the telephone. Although the goal of this research is to contact respondents within 2-3 weeks of their survey submission, respondents will be sent example screen shots during the interview as an aid in helping them remember the web instrument. The interviews will follow a semi-structured interview protocol (attached). Subject area specialists from the Census Bureau will participate in some of the debriefing interviews in order to observe the interview.

Sample: Staff from EMD and EWD will provide DCMRB staff with a list of recent 2017 Economic Census respondents for recruiting. This listing will include contact information, a size indicator for the company, and an listing of their major industry classification.

We plan to conduct approximately 100 interviews. We plan to conduct interviews with a variety of company sizes (small, medium, and large) and industry classification (i.e., services, wholesale, retail, manufacturing). Table 1 displays the targeted distribution for interviews.

Table 1. 2017 Economic Census Debriefings: Potential Respondent Distribution:

	Service	Wholesale	Retail	Manufacturing	Mining	Construction	TOTALS
Small	6	6	6	6	3	3	30
Medium	10	6	6	6	4	3	35
Large	10	6	6	6	4	3	35
TOTALS	26	18	18	18	11	9	100

This distribution was developed in collaboration with subject area specialists. This number of interviews was selected because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover target company sizes and classifications, and should be large enough to provide reactions to the instrument in order to identify meaningful findings.

Recruitment: We will contact potential participants via phone, explain the nature of our research, and ask them to participate in our study. The sample of participants will be those who are able to be contacted and who agree to participate in the study. 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 employees involved in the research project.

We will not be providing monetary incentives to participants in this study. It is anticipated that many of the interviews will be conducted at the time of the initial call. There may be some cases where the interview will need to be scheduled for a later time. If an interview is scheduled, respondents will receive a confirmation email as well as a reminder email or phone call prior to the interview.

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

1. **Attachment A:** Protocol used for each study to outline how the research study will be conducted
2. **Attachment B:** Instrument screenshots to illustrate features of the instrument that are being evaluated. This will be e-mailed to the participant after they agree to participate in the study.

Timeline: Testing will be conducted from June through October 2018.

For the debriefing phone calls, we expect that each interview will last no more than 30 minutes (100 cases x 30 minutes per case = 50 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 attempted phone calls per completed case x 100 cases x 3 minute per case = 25 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for the entirety of this project is approximately 75 hours (50 hours for interviews + 25 hours for recruiting).

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

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