

**Request:** The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). We plan to conduct debriefing interviews with business respondents to examine the accuracy and availability of a series of special inquiry items collected on the 2017 Economic Census forms covering Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. These items capture data on potential Factoryless Goods Producers (FGP).

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:**

The Census Bureau added 8 special inquiry questions to the 2017 Economic Census in order to attempt to identify “potential pure FGPs” -- Factoryless Goods Producers, establishments that control the design, production, and sale of products but contract with unaffiliated establishments to perform transformation activities.

Prior to the addition of these questions, the Census Bureau conducted multiple types of research on the topic, including:

- Respondent debriefings on 2012 Economic Census questions on contract manufacturing (97 interviews, establishments)
- Cognitive testing for 2016 Company Organization Survey – in support of the former Enterprise Statistics Program (2 rounds, 37 interviews, enterprises)
- Early stage scoping interviews (2 rounds, 21 interviews, establishments and enterprises)
- Cognitive interviews on 2017 Economic Census draft questions (4 rounds, 62 interviews, establishments)

Additionally, we collaborated regularly with researchers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Office of Survey Methods Research, who were also researching this topic.

The 8 questions added to the 2017 Economic Census focused on high-level concepts that appeared more likely to resonate with respondents in our research. Qualitative research results remained somewhat unclear, and stakeholders recognized the need for continued research. Because FGPs are a rare population and difficult to identify using traditional means, stakeholders decided that placing the questions on the 2017 Economic Census would provide a larger number of cases with the potential to be FGPs. These questions were placed on the 2017 Economic Census for all establishments in the relevant industries, solely for the purpose of continuing the required research, to provide evidence-based recommendations to OMB for their future decision with respect to the needs for industry classification. The current questions will not be used for producing tabulations or formal classification for official statistics.

These debriefings are one part of an evaluation plan which attempts to assess the data quality of these questions.

Results from the debriefings will be summarized in a written report, which we expect will be considered in conjunction with other empirical evaluations of data from the Economic Census other sources, in order to provide additional evidence for OMB's and other stakeholders' consideration of next steps.

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 evaluation, with support from staff from the Economy-Wide Statistics Division (EWD), and the Economic Management Division (EMD). For this research, we will interview up to 40 respondents.

**Population of Interest:** The new questions were included on 2017 Economic Census questionnaires covering Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. The focus will primarily be on establishments that report answers indicating they are more likely to be FGPs or for which their answers appeared inconclusive.

**Timeline:**

Recruiting for these interviews will begin in June 2018, for interviews that will be conducted June 2018 through January 2019.

**Language:**

This evaluation 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' reporting on the FGP special inquiry questions. All interviews will be conducted over the telephone. The interviews will follow a semi-structured interview protocol (Attachment A). Subject area specialists from the Census Bureau may observe some of the debriefing interviews.

**Sample Population:**

Staff from EMD and EWD will provide DCMRB staff with a list of recent 2017 Economic Census respondents for recruiting, focusing on those with responses of interest to the FGP special inquiry questions. This listing will include contact information, a size indicator for the company, and a listing of their major industry classification.

We plan to conduct approximately 40 interviews. We plan to conduct interviews with a variety of company sizes (small, medium, and large) and industry classification (i.e., Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, and Management of Companies and Enterprises). These items were not applicable to all respondents who answered these surveys, so, in order to gather sufficient information about these items, we will be specifically targeting the following NAICS industry groups: semiconductors, apparel, computers, commercial printing, pharmaceuticals, machine

shops, plastics, metals, miscellaneous food, and wholesale trade. This distribution was developed in collaboration with subject area specialists.

The 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 it should be large enough to provide reactions to the target questions in order to identify meaningful findings.

**Sample 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.

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 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.

**Protocol:** Participants will be asked debriefing questions about their experience completing the FGP special inquiry questions. The draft protocol is Attachment A.

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

**Length of interview:** We anticipate that each interview will include one participant. We estimate that, on average, the interviews will take one-half hour. Thus, the total estimated burden for completed interviews is 20 hours (40 interviews X 1 participants X .5 hour).

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 40 cases x 3 minute per case = 10 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for the entirety of this project is approximately 30 hours (20 hours for interviews + 10 hours for recruiting).

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

1. **Attachment A:** Protocol used for the debriefing evaluation
2. **Attachment B:** Draft questions being reviewed. This will be e-mailed to the participant if necessary after they agree to participate in the study.

**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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