

# Commodity Flow Portal

## Discussion Guide for Company Visits

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### *Group A: Companies already involved with Pilot*

#### **Introduction:**

- Thank you very much for your time. Let me start by telling you a little about what we will be doing today. The commodity flow survey provides detailed data on the movement of goods in the United States, and this data is used to analyze trends, to forecast the demand of goods, and to determine the need for associated infrastructure and equipment. The Census Bureau is interested in making reporting for the CFS easier for companies, more specifically how you gather and compile your data. Today we'd like to talk about how the new data transfer process is working at your company, and the details of how it was implemented.
- We are looking for opportunities to both improve the data products we provide policy makers, transportation professionals, and other data users, and to improve efficiency and reduce the cost – measured in your time - to companies through alternative methods of gathering business data, compared to our traditional survey collection processes.
- Our mission is to produce relevant, high-quality, and timely statistics about the country's population and economy. Our data users in government and the private sector rely on us to provide a wide range of data products, and also to serve as the gold standard against which data from other sources are benchmarked.
- Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

#### **Demographics:**

- Titles/Roles of Interviewees:
- Years in Position:

**Part 1: *How the previous method of data collection occurred***

- Can you describe the process for filling out the Commodity Flow Survey previously?
  - How many people were involved?
  - How many reports/databases were referenced?
  - How often did/does your company generate these reports?
  - Did the reporting for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter differ from the subsequent quarters?
- What inspired you to utilize this new system of data transfer?
- Why? What were the key issues being noticed?
  - What were the most burdensome/time consuming aspects?
- In what position/role is the individual tasked with filling out the most burdensome parts of CFS?
- Do you currently have data sharing or file transfer arrangements with other organizations, companies, or other government agencies?
  - What about transferring large data files within your company, among different entities or departments?
    - In a broad sense, how does this work?
    - What is the frequency of the file transfers you participate in, externally or internally? How was this frequency determined?
    - How is the security of the data files maintained?

**Part 2: *Steps taken to implement new method of data collection***

- When you switched to the new method of data collection, what departments got involved?
  - What role did the legal department play?
  - Was other leadership involved in the approval process?
  - Were there any specific permissions needed?
- Did you have any initial concerns?
  - What aspect of the data transfer is most concerning?
    - Sending the data?
    - Storing the data/Data protection?

- What steps did the IT department take?
- What was the biggest obstacle you encountered?
- Did anything unexpected come up?
  - What could we include as ways to avoid obstacles you encountered?

**Part 3: Data Systems** (Review spreadsheet)

- Are there any parts of the spreadsheet where having more instruction would be helpful?
- Do you have any recommendations for changes we could make to the template?
  - Would you suggest reordering any of the columns on the template?
- Are there any other sections you feel we could prefill for you? Or are there areas wherein embedding a formula would be helpful?
- We will no longer ask companies to look up the commodity codes but need good product descriptions or other classifications.
  - What types of product description data do you have in your records?
  - Do your records include Harmonized Codes?
  - Do your records include HAZMAT UN numbers?
  - Do your records include UPC, SKU, etc.?
  - How easy/difficult would it be to provide product description data?
    - Are they descriptions unique to your company and not easily understood?
- Did any part of the template stand out as particularly difficult to fill out?
  - What were the easiest sections?
- Do you have any other thoughts about how to improve the template?
- Approximately what level of burden is associated with creating a sample of shipments?
- Would providing all your shipments and locations as opposed to a sample effect this burden?
  - What would be the easiest amount of shipments to provide?
- How frequently would you prefer to send the data?
- What level of automation would you be comfortable with?
  - Do you have concerns regarding data quality confidentiality, data breeches, etc.?

**Part 4: *How Pilot is working currently***

- Overall, how easy or difficult would you say implementing this new process was?
- How can we make this easier to implement?
- How much time did it take before this new process?
  - Can you estimate how much/if any time has been saved?
- Would you anticipate any problems due to staff turnover? Supposing your firm had set up a process to report, would you foresee any issues coming up after, e.g. you left?
- If we wanted to offer a simple guidance to other companies outlining steps to take,
  - What could we include to make the process go smoothly?

**Wrap Up:**

- We are almost finished. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for us?
- Would we be able to get back in touch with you as we move forward with this process of redesigning the data collection for the Commodity Flow Survey to get additional input?
- Thank you so much for your time today.

# Commodity Flow Portal

## Discussion Guide for Company Visits

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### Group B: *Companies not involved with Pilot*

#### **Introduction:**

- Thank you very much for your time. Let me start by telling you a little about what we will be doing today. The commodity flow survey provides detailed data on the movement of goods in the United States, and this data is used to analyze trends, to forecast the demand of goods, and to determine the need for associated infrastructure and equipment. The Census Bureau is interested in making reporting for the CFS easier for companies, more specifically how you gather and compile your data.
- Today we'd like to talk about how a new process of data transfer that might be implemented, and to discuss what your initial thoughts and concerns are.
- We are looking for opportunities to both improve the data products we provide our users, and to improve efficiency and reduce the cost to companies through alternative methods of gathering business data, compared to our traditional survey collection processes.
- Our mission is to produce relevant, high-quality, and timely statistics about the country's population and economy. Our data users in government and the private sector rely on us to provide a wide range of data products, and also to serve as the gold standard against which data from other sources are benchmarked.
- Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

#### **Demographics:**

- Titles/Roles of Interviewees:
- Years in Position:

**Part 1: *How data collection occurs currently***

- Can you describe the process for filling out the Commodity Flow Survey currently?
  - How many people were involved?
  - How many reports/databases were referenced?
  - How often did your company generate these reports?
- Were there any consistent issues being noticed?
  - What were the most burdensome/time consuming aspects?
- In what role is the individual tasked with filling out the most burdensome parts of CFS?

**Part 2: *New method of data collection***

[Describe the new process of data transfer]

- Do you currently have data sharing or file transfer arrangements with other organizations, companies, or perhaps other government agencies?
  - What about transferring large data files within your company, among different entities or departments?
    - In a broad sense, how does this work?
    - What is the frequency of the file transfers you participate in, externally or internally? How was this frequency determined?
    - How is the security of the data files maintained?
- What are your expectations for how this data sharing or files transfer arrangement would work with us?
  - Your roles and responsibilities? Our roles and responsibilities?
- What are your thoughts about providing all shipments/locations versus a sample of shipments?
  - What would be a preferable amount of shipments to provide?
- How frequently would you prefer to send the data?
- How might file size affect file transfer frequency?
  - Would higher frequency data transfers mitigate issues with large file sizes?
- What level of automation would you be comfortable with?
- What departments would likely get involved to initiate and implement these changes?

- Do you have any initial concerns?
  - What aspect of the data transfer is most concerning?
    - Sending the data?
    - Storing the data/Data protection?
- Do you anticipate any obstacles?
- Would you anticipate any problems due to staff turnover? Supposing your firm had set up a process to report, would you foresee any issues coming up after (e.g.) you left?
- Do you think your company would be willing to participate?
- How difficult do you anticipate a change like this being?
- How would the ideal process work?

**Part 3: Data Systems (Review spreadsheet)**

- In terms of the spreadsheet you will be filling out which would be requesting the same data you fill out now, do you think that there any other sections you feel we could prefill for you? Or are there areas wherein embedding a formula would be helpful?
- We will no longer ask companies to look up the commodity codes but need good product descriptions or other classifications.
  - What types of product description data do you have in your records?
  - Do your records include Harmonized Codes?
  - Do your records include HAZMAT UN numbers?
  - Do your records include UPC, SKU, etc.?
  - How easy/difficult would it be to provide product description data?
    - Are they descriptions unique to your company and not easily understood?
- Did any part of the template stand out as particularly difficult to fill out?
- What were the easiest sections?
- Do you have any other thoughts about how to improve the template?
- Approximately what level of burden is associated with creating a sample of shipments?
- Would providing all your shipments and locations as opposed to a sample effect this burden?
  - What would be the easiest amount of shipments to provide?
- How frequently would you prefer to send the data?
- What level of automation would you be comfortable with?
  - Do you have concerns regarding data quality confidentiality, data breeches, etc.?

**Wrap Up:**

- We are almost finished. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for us?
- Would we be able to get back in touch with you as we move forward with this process of redesigning the data collection for the Commodity Flow Survey to get additional input?
- Thank you so much for your time today.