

## 2020 Annual Capital Expenditures Survey – Questions Related to Coronavirus Pandemic

### Cognitive Interviewing Protocol

Legend:

Black font- interview scripts and probes to be administered by interviewers

BLACK UNDERLINED UPPERCASE font- conditions for additional probes

[Red font with brackets] - interviewer actions to be performed

Interview date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview start time: \_\_\_\_\_

[Interviewer: at the start of the interview, please assist the respondent to:

- (1) connect to Skype for Business and share their screen,
- (2) access the web survey,
- (3) sign the digital consent form and explain the consent materials as needed,
- (4) and click through to the Introduction page.]

[Interviewer: Read (or paraphrase) the Introduction to the respondent.]

### Introduction

The U.S. Census Bureau is requesting your help to assist the Annual Capital Expenditures Survey (ACES) with testing some survey questions focused on understanding the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on your company's capital expenditure investments. These questions will be added to the end of the ACES questionnaire.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will complete a few questions about the pandemic's impact. You will be asked to read the instructions and questions aloud and then "think aloud" as you answer each question. This may feel a little unnatural, but it will help us understand how you think about and answer each question. Here's an example:

*Suppose this were a survey about your home and one of the questions asked, "How many bedrooms are there in your house?" Someone thinking aloud as they respond might say, "What do you mean by bedrooms—are these just where people sleep? If so, I have 2 bedrooms. But if we are counting anything with a closet and a window, we also have a study. So perhaps, we have 3 bedrooms. I'm going with where people sleep, so I'll answer 2 bedrooms."*

At the end of the survey I will ask you some additional questions to get your feedback on the survey questions. The purpose of this conversation is to learn whether the survey questions are worded clearly and, if they are not, what changes should be made—your actual answers to the survey questions are not the focus of this interview. I did not write these questions and won't be offended if you critique them. Your honest feedback is very important. If something is confusing, it means that the question or instructions should be improved.

Your participation is especially important, as it will help the Census Bureau improve these questions to accurately measure economic activities of businesses like yours. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

[Interviewer action: Answer questions, as needed.]

Let's get started with some background information about your business.

(1) First, tell me about your company: What do you do or make?

(2) And what is your role or title?

(3) Can you tell me about your experience completing the Annual Capital Expenditures Survey?

Now let's move on to the survey. Please read and think aloud to complete the survey.

[Interviewer action: Observe how respondent answers the survey and watch for any difficulty in determining their answers to the questions.]

[Interviewer action: Once respondents completed the survey at Q4, proceed to probe.]

I have a couple general questions for you before we discuss each of the survey questions.

If you were taking this survey normally—not thinking aloud—approximately how long do you think it would take to complete?

Do you think you would consult or request input from any other people for assistance in completing these questions?

IF YES:

Who would you consult? [Probe to capture position title, department, and any other details helpful to knowing where this information is available within the company.]

How easy or difficult would it be to coordinate with them and get their help?

Are there any particular questions that you would consult them on?

How much time do you think it would take to find out the answer to questions you're unsure about? [Probe to clarify (1) the time respondents think it will take the other person to answer versus (2) the lapsed time from when the respondent requests assistance until they get an answer from the other person.]

## Probes for Q1

Now I'd like to go back and discuss the questions. Please click back to Question 1.

This first question asked about government assistance programs. How did you arrive at your answer?

What kinds of government programs were you thinking of when you answered this question? Could you give some examples?

### IF RESPONDENT SELECTED DON'T KNOW:

You selected "Don't know." Please tell me more about why you chose that response. **[Probe to determine why they don't know.]**

## Probes for Q1.1

**[Interviewer action: Skip Q1.1 if respondent did not answer Q1.1.]**

Now let's look at Question 1.1. How did you arrive at these numbers?

How confident are you about your responses?

How much estimation did you need to do, if any?

The question asks for the amount of dollars spent on each category. If the question asked for percentages, tell me how you would go about coming up with percentages for each of these categories? [Probe, if needed, how much estimation would you need to do, if any.]

How confident would you be providing percentages?

Would you rather report the percentage of financial assistance spent on each category, or do you prefer reporting the dollar amount? [Probe to determine why.]

## Probes for Q2

Let's move on to Question 2.

In your own words, what do you think this question is asking?

How did you arrive at your answers?

Looking at the list of checkboxes, are any of these options confusing or unclear? **[Probe to determine which one(s) and why.]**

Can you think of any additional options that should be listed here?

How confident are you that you answered this question correctly on behalf of your company?

### IF RESPONDENT SELECTED NOT APPLICABLE:

You selected "Not applicable." What led you to select that option?

### IF RESPONDENT SELECTED DON'T KNOW:

You selected "Don't know." Please tell me more about why you chose that response. **[Probe to determine why they don't know.]**

## Probes for Q3

Let's move on to Question 3.

In your own words, what do you think this question is asking?

What do you think is meant by "planned capital expenditures" in this question?

## Probes for Q3.1

[Interviewer action: Skip Q3.1 if respondent did not answer Q3.1.]

Let's look at Question 3.1 now. How did you come up with your answer to this question?

Can you tell me more about the changes to your company's capital investments in response to the Coronavirus pandemic? Can you tell me about the changes your company made?

How easy or difficult was it for you to answer this question? [Probe if needed to determine what was difficult.]

Is anything about this question confusing or unclear? [Probe if needed to determine what was confusing/unclear.]

What do you think about the options in this question—how well do they match your company's experience?

Can you think of any additional options that could be listed here? Can you give me an example of a situation in which a company should select that option?



## Probes for Q4

Let's now move on to Question 4.

In your own words, what do you think this question is asking?

How did you come up with your answer to this question?

This question asks about investments related to social distancing or safety. What do you think that refers to? Can you give me some examples?

There are two options for responding "Yes." What do you think is the difference between these options?

What do you think of these answer options? Would you have preferred having additional answers to choose from?

## Concluding Probe(s)

Are there any other details about the Coronavirus pandemic in relation to your company's capital expenditure investments that you would like us to know about?

Thinking back over the entire survey, is there anything else you'd like to discuss?

Now that you've seen these questions, I'd like to ask for your help with just one more thing. These questions will be added to the end of the ACES questionnaire. We have prepared the following introduction to these questions. Would you please review and comment on it?

[Interviewer action: Ask respondents to click to the next page after Q4 and read aloud the transitional introductory text displayed on the webpage.]

"The following questions are focused on helping the U.S. Census Bureau measure business access and use of government financial assistance and the impact on capital expenditure investments during the Coronavirus pandemic."

Is this introduction clearly written and easily understood? Is this introduction consistent with how you answered the questions?

[Interviewer action: If respondent indicates "no" or that the introduction is inconsistent with their experience, probe to determine how/why.]

Do you have any suggestions to improve the clarity of the introduction?

Is there anything else the Introduction should say that would help you answer these questions?

Those are all the questions I have for you. Thank you very much for participating!