

Generic Information Collection Request

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 debriefing interviews with business respondents to examine the accuracy and availability of an item that was added to the Annual Capital Expenditures Survey (ACES).

Purpose:

The ACES is a mandatory annual collection that gathers data on business investment for new and used structures and equipment. This survey is collected under the authority of Title 13, United States Code (U.S.C.). It is a sample survey of approximately 70,000 companies. Basic data for each year include all expenditures during the year for both new and used structures and equipment chargeable to asset accounts for which depreciation or amortization accounts are ordinarily maintained. For reference years ending in "2" and "7," detailed data by types of structures and types of equipment are collected from companies with employees.

Data on the amount of business expenditures for new plants and equipment and measures of the stock of existing facilities are critical to evaluate productivity growth, the ability of U.S. business to compete with foreign business, changes in industrial capacity, and measures of overall economic performance. Industry analysts use the data for market analysis, economic forecasting, identifying business opportunities, and developing strategic plans. Government agencies use the data to improve estimates for investment indicators for monetary policy, improve estimates for capital stocks for productivity analysis, monitor and evaluate the healthcare industry, and analyze depreciation. Other users of the data include private companies, organizations, educators, students, and economic researchers.

Further information regarding ACES can be found at this website:
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/aces/about.html>

The Census Bureau added a question to the 2018 ACES to collect information on the investment in robotics. Robotics have been increasingly used across all sectors of the economy with little data collected about them (now there are also new questions on this topic on the Annual Survey of Manufactures and the Annual Business Survey). Areas of research using this data may include the types of firms that use robotics, their relationship with human labor and employment rates, and how various aspects of the market might influence the use of robotics. The question asks for the capital expenditures for new and used robotic equipment in 2018.

These debriefings are one part of an evaluation plan, which will attempt to assess the data quality of this question. 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 ACES, 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 office of the Associate Director for Economic Programs (ADEP). For this research, we will interview up to 20 respondents.

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 robotic question. 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.

Population of interest:

Staff from the EWD and ADEP will provide DCMRB staff with a list of businesses and respondent contact information, from which we will recruit. The frame of respondents will be recent respondents to the Annual Capital Expenditures Survey, who answered the question about robotic equipment.

Approximately 20 interviews will be conducted in total. This number of interviews was selected because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, and should be large enough to provide reactions to the question and definitions that are representative of the survey population.

Sample recruitment:

We will contact potential participants via phone or email, 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. Efforts will be made to sample respondents from a variety of industries, from variably-sized companies. We will attempt to recruit those who provided answers to the question, and those who did not, including those who wrote in comments.

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 or those with Special Sworn Status who are involved in the research project. We will not be providing monetary incentives to participants in this study. Once interviews are scheduled, researchers will send respondents a confirmation via email, and may conduct reminder calls a few days before the meetings.

Language:

Testing will be conducted in English only.

Timeline:

Recruiting for these interviews will begin as early as January, 2020 and continue through April, 2020.

Our goal is to schedule up 20 interviews. We anticipate that each interview will include one participant. We estimate that, on average, the interviews will take 30 minutes. Thus, the total estimated burden for completed interviews is 10 hours (20 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 20 cases x 3 minute per case = 5 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for the entirety of this project is approximately 15 hours (10 hours for interviews + 5 hours for recruiting).

Enclosure:

Enclosed is the protocol (which includes the draft question) that we will be using for the telephone respondent debriefing interviews.

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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Enclosure

Cc:

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