

Small Business Pulse Survey

Request for OMB Approval

July 23, 2020

Supporting Statement Section B

As noted in Part A, the Small Business Pulse Survey is in experimental product. Fielding this survey during the COVID-19 pandemic is a proof of concept. As such, the methodology detailed here may adapt over time. As the methodology adapts, we will submit non-substantive changes to this information collection request to OMB. In addition, we will provide all information about sampling, weighting, and post-survey processing on our website to maximize transparency for the public. This transparency is especially important given the value to decision makers of having weekly state-by-state estimates of the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on business operations, finances, and expectations for small businesses.

The Census Bureau is currently conducting the Small Business Pulse Survey (SBPS). We've finished conducting Phase 1 of the survey which included 9 weeks of data collection. This non-substantive change request documents our plan to conduct Phase 2 of the SBPS. Phase 2 will also occur over 9 weeks starting in August and ending in October of this year. The following supporting statement is the same document submitted originally for Phase 1. We have highlighted those areas where new or revised information is presented.

1. Universe and Respondent Selection

The target population is all non-farm, single-location employer businesses (receipts \geq \$1,000) with 1-499 employees in the 50 states, DC and Puerto Rico, and in industries covered in the Economic Census. The Business Register contains validated e-mail addresses for 940,588 businesses in the target population. These email addresses will be updated and supplemented with emails collected via other means, such as the Census Bureau's Customer Respondent Management tool used for respondent communication across economic surveys, to identify the best contact for the business. For further discussion of the target population and use of email address, see Attachment H.

The universe will be subdivided into nine groups. Each group of ~100k businesses will receive an email with a survey link one week out of the nine week data collection period. This will minimize respondent burden, while also providing the data needed to produce detailed estimates by sector and state and for the top 50 MSAs. We expect to complete 9 weeks of data collection. Additional weeks of collection could be possible, and we will work in coordination with OMB to make that determination. If additional weeks of collection are deemed warranted, we will update documentation through a nonsubstantive change request to this package. Efforts will be made to account for potential biases in survey estimates due to the non-probabilistic sample by applying a weighting class adjustment. We are working to develop this adjustment in parallel with initiating data collection, and we expect that the adjustment methods may change as we learn through this collection process. For further discussion of survey methodology, see Attachment H.

2. Procedures for Collecting Information

Businesses will be contacted via email based on known email addresses that have been collected across economic programs. The sample will be split so that ~100,000 different respondents are selected weekly to reduce burden and survey fatigue. Emails will be delivered in increments of 25,000 between the hours of 9AM -3PM every Sunday for nine weeks. An hour will be allowed for the delivery of the 25,000 emails and an hour will be allowed after the conclusion of the sending batch to gauge optimal timing of email delivery. The respondent can respond at any point, but their response will be allocated to the week in which they responded. (The methodology to describe how we will handle this allowance in producing the estimates is available in Attachment H.) The email will include a Thursday due date. Businesses that have not responded before Wednesday morning will receive a due date reminder email on Wednesday.

Data collection for the new SBPS will be conducted using an initial email invitation to the in-scope population. The email invitation will describe the purpose of the survey collection and will contain the authentication code that is linked to the business's EIN in our internal database. The website address will direct respondents to a landing page that provides motivational text to encourage response, links to releases of the data products, and a direct link to the Centurion landing page to respond to the survey. As of 7/17/2020, the landing page is not live off census.gov, but screenshots from the page can be found in Attachment C. The production landing page will be found at <https://www.census.gov/businesspulse>. See Attachment I for examples of the survey invitation email and follow-up emails.

The Census Bureau's Centurion team developed the required electronic collection infrastructure including a welcome screen, screens for providing response to survey questions, and finally a submission complete/thank you screen. Once credentials are established, the respondent will be presented with the established 20 questions. See Attachment A that provides the survey content.

Messaging on the SBPS landing page will speak to the legitimacy of the collection and will include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Additionally, respondents can respond to the email address with questions that will be answered by staff at Census Bureau Headquarters.

The data collection schedule by week with corresponding due dates is as follows:

Reference Week	Dates	Due Date
1	August 9 - August 15	August 13
2	August 16 - August 22	August 20
3	August 23 - August 29	August 27
4	August 30 - September 5	September 3
5	September 6 - September 12	September 10
6	September 13 - September 19	September 17
7	September 20 - September 26	September 24
8	September 27 - October 3	October 1
9	October 4 - October 10	October 8

Knowing that small businesses are actively dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Census Bureau is optimistically aiming for a response rate of 15-20%. This estimate is based on the weekly average response rate of 25% for the first phase of the Small Business Pulse Survey. We anticipate a lower response rate due to possible survey fatigue as well as the potential for business deaths leading to a smaller target population. For further discussion of response rates and nonresponse bias, see Attachment H.

3. Methods to Maximize Response

The Census Bureau has put in a place the following to maximize response:

- Respondents will receive an email invitation with a direct link to complete the survey. They will simply need to enter the authentication code credential into the Centurion instrument.
- The collection instrument is optimized for electronic response, including the option to respond via a mobile device.
- All questions are checkbox responses in order to limit burden and maximize response.
- A landing page was developed off census.gov that provides motivational text to encourage response, links to releases of the data products, and a direct link to the Centurion landing page.
- We expect that real-time survey results displayed on the dashboard will generate interest in the products and businesses will see value in responding.

4. Tests of Procedures or Methods

Prior to collection two rounds of cognitive testing were conducted from June 24, 2020 through July 13, 2020. Twenty-six interviews were conducted during the first round of testing, and fourteen were conducted during the second round of testing. Both rounds of testing included small businesses across all in-scope sectors that were sampled during Wave 4 of the Phase 1 Small Business Pulse Survey (SBPS). During cognitive interviews respondents answered all questions for the SBPS and were asked retrospective cognitive probes that focused on new questions for the Phase 2 survey.

The Census Bureau will release these data under the auspices of its Experimental Statistical Product Series. Information on the Series is available at <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html#>.

5. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection

Nick Orsini, Associate Director for Economic Programs, may be contacted (301-763-6959) regarding the statistical and data collection aspects of the Small Business Pulse Survey.