

**OMB Information Collection Request  
Supporting Statement B  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Small Business Pulse Survey  
During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

As noted in Part A, the Small Business Pulse Survey was initially fielded as a proof of concept to test the Federal statistical system's ability to produce data in near real-time in the face of a national emergency. The survey is conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Census Bureau's Experimental Data Products Series (see <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html>).

Planning for the survey began in March 2020, and with OMB emergency clearance granted on April 22, 2020 for 180 days of data collection (OMB No. 0607-1014, Exp. 10/31/2020), the Census Bureau launched the Small Business Pulse Survey on April 26, 2020. Data were first released on May 14, 2020, with updated releases made subsequently on a weekly basis. Since then, the data have been used widely to guide response and recovery efforts for small businesses. This Information Collection Request (ICR) is submitted for the purposes of requesting regular clearance, which would authorize continued collection of the Small Business Pulse Survey data once the emergency clearance expires on October 31, 2020. The coronavirus pandemic and the period of recovery from it continues, so we are requesting clearance to conduct the survey beyond the emergency clearance expiration.

For the purposes of referencing prior ICRs, we refer to the initial approval by OMB to conduct the Small Business Pulse Survey as "Phase 1" (April – June, 2020), and the second approved clearance as "Phase 2" (August – October, 2020). This ICR requests regular (non-emergency) approval to conduct "Phase 3", starting November, 2020. The first cycle of Phase 3 is proposed to begin November, 2020 and end January, 2020. Then, the Census Bureau plans for a break of at least 4 weeks to afford for evaluation.

Given the rapid response nature of this survey, the Census Bureau continued to make adjustments in content and methods throughout Phase 1, documenting those through the submission of non-substantive change requests to OMB. As data collection progressed, there was increasing demand from other Federal agencies to revise or add content to the Small Business Pulse questionnaire to produce data in support of their own missions and response to the pandemic. Rather than changing the survey on a continuous basis, the Census Bureau consolidated those requests into one comprehensively revised questionnaire, which was launched in Phase 2.

The Census Bureau's approach to Phase 3 will be similar to Phase 2, including the content, contact strategies, mode, data collection cycle and sampling approach. However, we will continue to monitor data needs over the course of the pandemic and its recovery. Should changes be warranted in questionnaire content or other aspects of the survey, the Census Bureau will pursue approval from OMB for such changes through the process described in Supporting Statement A.

As in Phases 1 and 2, we will provide all information about sampling, weighting, post-survey processing, and cognitive testing results on our website to maximize transparency for the public.

## **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 approximately 940k businesses in the target population. These email addresses were 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 D.

The full e-mail sample was subdivided into the same nine groups determined for Phases 1 and 2. Units responding in Phase 1 or 2 as permanently out of business or identified as out of scope to the survey were removed from the Phase 3 sample. The businesses in each Phase 3 group (approximately 100,000 units) will receive an email with a survey link one week out of the nine week data collection period. This collection minimizes respondent burden while also providing the data needed to publish estimates by industry and geography. Weighting class adjustments are applied to the sample so that each week's sample is representative of the universe. The initial weight for each unit is set to the count of the total number of in-scope units in the universe (cases with and without email addresses) in the same state by 3-digit NAICS industry, divided by the number of the units in the same grouping with an email address. Non-response adjustments are also applied to account for unit nonresponse. Within each 2-digit NAICS, nonresponse adjustment factors are calculated for businesses by three employment size classes, to account for differential response by business size: 4 or fewer employees; between 5 and 19 employees; and 20 or more employees. For a particular week, the nonresponse adjustment factors are the sum of the sampling weights of all businesses in the weekly panel divided by the sum of the sampling weights of all responding businesses in period. These factors are applied to adjust the sampling weights for all respondents in the same adjustment cell.

## **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 every Monday between the hours of 6AM-8PM over a nine week period. 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 during the nine week phase, 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 D.) 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 Small Business Pulse Survey will be conducted using an initial email invitation to the in-scope population (Attachment B). 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.

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

Reference Week	Dates	Due Date
1	November 9 - November 15	November 12
2	November 16 – November 22	November 19
3	November 23 – November 29	November 26
4	November 30 – December 6	December 3
5	December 7 – December 13	December 10
6	December 14 – December 20	December 17
7	December 21 – December 27	December 24
8	December 28 – January 3	December 31
9	January 4 – January 10	January 7

### 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 for 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 near real-time survey results displayed on the dashboard will generate interest in the products and businesses will see value in responding.
- Businesses that have not responded before Wednesday morning will receive a due date reminder email that same day.

We anticipate a lower response rate, compared to previous phases, 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 D.

Phase 1 and 2 survey response rates were approximately 26% and 23%, respectively.

#### **4. Testing of Procedures**

In order to field the first phase quickly, questions were reviewed by Census Bureau staff who are experts in the field of questionnaire design. The process for expert review in lieu of in-field expert review was approved by the Methodology and Standards Council at the Census Bureau. Cognitive testing was later performed concurrent with the Phase 1 collection, and findings and recommendations were reviewed and implemented where feasible.

Prior to collection of the Phase 2 content, 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 week 4 of the Phase 1 Small Business Pulse Survey. During cognitive interviews respondents answered all questions and were asked retrospective cognitive probes that focused on new questions for the Phase 2 survey.

We will take a similar course for Phase 3: feedback from Federal agency partners, data users and other stakeholders on diminishing, changing or emerging data needs will inform changes to the questionnaire. If changes are warranted, the Census Bureau will submit those requests via the process outlined in Supporting Statement A.

The Census Bureau will release these data through 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.