

**U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Census Bureau  
OMB Information Collection Request  
Business Trends and Outlook Survey  
OMB Control Number 0607-XXXX**

**Supporting Statement Section B**

**The Business Trends and Outlook Survey methodology detailed here may be modified over time. The Census Bureau will submit a request to OMB including 30 days of public comment announced in the Federal Register to receive approval to make any substantive revisions to the content or methodology of the Business Trends and Outlook Survey. In addition, the Census Bureau will provide all information about sampling, weighting, post-survey processing, and estimation on our website to maximize transparency for the public.**

**1. Universe and Respondent Selection**

The Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS) will expand the scope used for the Small Business Pulse Survey to include large employer businesses (those with 500 or more employees), multi-unit businesses (those with establishments in more than one location), and non-employer businesses (those with no paid employees). BTOS will also include the U.S. Island Areas in addition to Puerto Rico as with the Small Business Pulse Survey (SBPS), the BTOS will include most non-farm sectors of the U.S. economy. The increased scope mentioned above will incrementally build on the success of the SBPS and be implemented using components of the current SBPS platform. The first stage of the BTOS will be an expansion of the SBPS to include the addition of large single unit employer businesses (those with 500 or more employees), the second stage will include multi-unit businesses, and the final design will include non-employer businesses. At this latter stage, the BTOS will be capable of producing high frequency statistics across most non-farm sectors of the U.S. economy with detailed data on employer and non-employer businesses by sector and subsector, geography (the fifty U.S. states, Washington D.C., and the U.S. Island Areas), and employer size class.

The total universe of single-location employer businesses is approximately 5.4 million businesses. The total estimated sample size is 1.2 million businesses. Each sampled business will be systematically assigned to one of six bi-weekly panels to create a twelve-week wave. Each panel of ~200,000 businesses will receive either a letter or an email with a direct survey link once every twelve weeks. Businesses for which the Census Bureau has a valid email address will receive an email; otherwise, they will receive a letter. The sample of 1.2 million businesses will be used for one year and a new sample of 1.2 million businesses will be produced annually. This will minimize respondent burden, while also providing the data needed to produce detailed estimates by sector, state, state by sector, sub-sector, the largest fifty Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) by population size, employment size, and

employer status. The Census Bureau plans to continuously collect data every two weeks indefinitely.

## **2. Procedures for Collecting Information**

The BTOS will be a continuous bi-weekly data collection. Businesses will be contacted via email based on known email addresses that have been collected across Census Bureau economic programs. Businesses with no known email address will be contacted via physical letter sent to the address included in the business frame, the Business Register. The sample will be split so that ~200,000 different respondents are selected bi-weekly to reduce burden and survey fatigue.

Invitations to respond to the new BTOS will describe the purpose of the survey collection and will contain the credentials that are 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 includes a direct link to the Centurion landing page to respond to the survey.

The Census Bureau's Centurion team will develop the required electronic collection infrastructure including a welcome screen, screens for providing response to survey questions, a printable PDF for respondent records, and a submission complete/thank you screen. Once credentials are established, the respondent will be presented with the questionnaire. See Attachment A to review PDF questionnaire.

The BTOS landing page will address the legitimacy of the collection and will include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Additionally, respondents can respond to an email address found there with questions that will be answered by staff at Census Bureau Headquarters.

The Census Bureau expects a response rate of at least 22.5% based on response rates from the Census Bureau's Small Business Pulse Survey. Methods to Maximize Response  
The Census Bureau has put in a place the following to maximize response:

- Respondents will receive a letter or email invitation with a direct link to complete the survey.
- The collection instrument is optimized for electronic response, including the option to respond via a mobile device.
- Most of the questions are qualitative, with checkbox responses to limit burden and maximize response.
- Generally, questions will not require accessing business records.
  
- A large panel sample will be split over 12 weeks so that businesses only receive one survey request every twelve weeks. Each panel sample will only be used for up to one year (52 or 53 weeks), so businesses will receive a survey request four or five times per year while in sample.
- Like the SBPS, near real-time survey results displayed on the dashboard may generate interest in the products and motivate response.

### **3. Tests of Procedures or Methods**

The information collection will use procedures that are based on those that underpin the SBPS; these procedures will be improved using the lessons learned from the SBPS.

Survey questions have been developed using cognitive testing procedures as specified by Census Bureau Quality Standards. Cognitive interviewing is a qualitative method which uses a protocol that includes standardized and scripted probes. Probes are designed to learn how the respondent interprets each question and to assess respondent burden. This allows for the clarification of survey concepts and questions to increase consistent interpretation of and response to content.

Survey questions that have appeared on the SBPS were tested contemporaneously. New survey questions have been developed and refined after nine interviews, with Census Bureau research and program staff working in consultation with staff who are experts in the field of cognitive research.

The Census Bureau will initially release BTOS data as experimental data products. Information on Experimental Statistical Products is available at <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html#>.

### **4. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection**

Persons responsible for directing the sampling, estimation, nonresponse adjustment and disclosure avoidance procedures:

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Persons responsible for directing the survey design, content development, processing, analysis, and data publication:

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### **Attachments**

- A. Draft content
- B. Draft respondent letter/email BTOS-L1
- C. Relevant Sections from Title 13 U.S.C.