

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR
QUARTERLY CENSUS OF EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES
BUSINESS SUPPLEMENT**

OMB CONTROL NO. 1220-0198

This Information Collection Request (ICR) seeks Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval for a revision to the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Business Supplement (QBS). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) QBS is designed to quickly capture information on the U.S. economy, allowing stakeholders and data users to better understand the impacts of current and ongoing events on U.S. businesses. The QBS is designed to incorporate new questionnaires as the need arises on relevant topics. The initial survey under the QBS renewal (QBS-2024-1) will collect information on telework, hiring, and vacancies at establishments.

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.

This request is for the renewal of the QBS collection under OMB Control Number 1220-0198. The 2024 QBS survey will ask businesses about telework, hiring, and vacancies in Summer 2024. It is intended to offer an updated snapshot of these essential business activities two years after nearly identical questions were first asked in the 2022 QBS survey, called the 2022 Business Response Survey.

The QBS allows BLS to collect new information about the U.S. economy in an efficient and cost-effective manner. It allows the BLS and data users to better understand specific economic issues of emerging relevance, or the impact of specific events (e.g., policy changes, strikes, resource shortages, health epidemics, terrorist attacks, and severe weather) on the economy in a timely manner, allowing policy makers to make informed decisions.

The QCEW program produces a comprehensive tabulation of employment and wages for workers covered by state Unemployment Insurance (UI) laws and Federal workers covered by the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) program. The UI administrative records are the foundation for the QCEW. While based on the UI administrative data, it is the detailed review and editing, along with the additional detail collected and updated via the Multiple Worksite Report (MWR) and Annual Refiling Survey (ARS) that allows the QCEW to serve as the sampling frame for BLS establishment surveys. The information collected, edited, and maintained by the QCEW program allows BLS to publish information reflective of the entire U.S. economy. The QCEW currently is the most frequent, comprehensive, accurate, and timely publication of information available with the most industry and geographical detail on the U.S. economy. Additionally, the QCEW is the only source of monthly employment for the U.S. economy at this level of detail.

Each year, the QCEW program conducts the ARS by asking approximately 1.5 million establishments to verify their main business activity and their mailing and physical location addresses. BLS has successfully transitioned the ARS to a fully online survey and accelerated the timeframe for collection. This fully web-based ARS introduced a low-cost platform for conducting the QBS. The QBS accompanying the ARS has little data collection overhead, leveraging the address refinement, printing, and mailing efforts that are undertaken as part of the production ARS.

The QBS is a versatile collection instrument, allowing the BLS to capture information relatively quickly on events affecting the U.S. economy, such as the coronavirus pandemic. The QBS undergoes the OMB clearance process every three years with a 60-day and 30-day notice. This request describes the general nature of the QBS collection. Detailed information on the 2024 QBS survey covering telework, hiring, and vacancies is also provided within this request. When the need to capture new information on the economy arises, the BLS will develop successive surveys that are specific to those data needs. The BLS will submit separate requests to OMB to conduct each new survey under the QBS clearance. Each OMB request will include additional details on each of these surveys, including the estimated burden hours. The BLS will provide the public with an opportunity to comment on these questionnaires via a 30-day Federal Register notice in which additional details will be provided.

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

The purpose of the QBS is to facilitate collections of new information about the U.S. economy in a timely manner. Data collected under the QBS will be used by government program officials, industry, academia, etc. to investigate timely topics about which there is little existing data.

The primary purpose for the 2021 QBS survey (the 2021 Business Response Survey) was to collect information on how businesses were continuing to change their operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. These data were released to the public in February 2022.¹ The 2022 QBS (2022 Business Response Survey) collected information on telework, hiring, and vacancies at businesses as they began the transition through the mid- and late-stages of the coronavirus pandemic. These data were released to the public in March 2023.² The 2024 survey will repeat most of the 2022 questions to better understand how telework, hiring, and vacancies have changed since emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Topic areas include telework, hiring and methods employers use to attract new hires, vacancies by duration, and methods employers use to advertise vacancies. This information, in combination with previously collected QBS data and other BLS data, will help create a more robust understanding of how businesses attract and retain employees in the post-pandemic environment.

With the intended large QBS sample size, BLS plans to calculate estimates at the national, state, industry sector, and size class levels. This will allow for an assessment of differences among businesses by state and industry. The goal for the data is a public news release, research articles, and articles in academic journals. BLS expects to publish survey results nationally, by state, by industry sector, by establishment size, and by state and industry sector where possible. These goals are contingent on response and the ability to meet disclosure avoidance thresholds.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/covid2.nr0.htm>

² <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/BRS1.nr0.htm>

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also, describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

For the QBS collection, BLS will be utilizing available information technology to minimize government costs and respondent burden. The survey responses will be collected entirely online and rely on the existing data collection instruments of the BLS QCEW program's ARS, along with a recently completed stand-alone front-end system generically labelled as the BLS Business Survey (BBS). See more information about the ARS instrument in the current approval for this collection (OMB No. 1220-0032).

For units that are in-scope for both the QBS and the ARS, upon completion of the ARS respondents are asked to answer additional questions and if they agree to do so, are transitioned to the QBS collection instrument. For units that are in scope for the QBS, but are not in scope for the ARS, respondents will receive a supplemental one-page letter or email, directing them to login to the BBS online to complete the QBS. The QBS survey questions are displayed to the respondent identically in both the ARS and stand-alone BBS front-end systems.

This allows for a large, nationally representative sample to be surveyed with minimal financial costs to BLS.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item A.2 above.

The QBS instrument can be used to gather information on recent or current events – such as the impact of strikes, health epidemics, or severe weather on businesses. The QBS can also be used to gather information on emerging issues of particular importance to the economy. The content of each QBS questionnaire will be dependent upon these events or issues, which are not currently known. Since each is unique and not known in advance, the data generally will not be available elsewhere. Due to the unique circumstance of these situations, duplication of the information is typically not an issue. However, prior to conducting each survey, BLS will make efforts to determine whether the requested information is available from another source, by contacting other federal agencies or other offices within the Department of Labor, as well as seeking input from various stakeholders such as the Small Business Administration, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Census Bureau, and others.

BLS coordinated collection related to telework, hiring, and vacancies in the 2022 QBS across BLS programs to both minimize duplication and to ensure the data collected on the QBS would be of value to their programs. Additionally, for the 2022 QBS, BLS engaged the BLS Data User Advisory Committee (DUAC) to solicit topics, feedback, and recommendations to better understand the needs of a wide array of stakeholders.

The 2024 survey will ask virtually the same questions as the 2022 survey. One original 2022 question on telework before the pandemic began has been deleted, and two “screener” questions have been added to enable automatic skip pattern navigation in the 2024 online instrument. The question text is otherwise

unaltered except for the reference period. As with the 2022 QBS, BLS has coordinated collection related to telework, hiring, and vacancies across BLS programs to both minimize duplication and to ensure the data collected on the QBS would be of value to their programs. Specifically, QBS data on hiring and vacancies would complement but not duplicate information collected and published by the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS). The JOLTS program provides timely information about hires and vacancies at the national level by industry and at the state level overall. However, there are relatively few data sources that shed light on how many establishments are facing worker shortages, how many have hired multiple workers, how long their vacancies have been open before being filled, how employers are seeking to attract workers, and the credentials of the hired workers. Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, produced under the Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership by the Census Bureau, provides summaries by quarter of hires by industry, geography, and firm size.³ LEHD data are produced by combining QCEW administrative data with other Census Bureau data to produce statistics on employment, earnings, and job flows. While these data complement the QBS hiring data, they do not include information on how establishments attract new hires and advertise vacancies. Likewise, telework data collected through the QBS would complement but not duplicate Current Population Survey (CPS) information on telework. The CPS data, which are collected from individuals, provide valuable data from the perspective of workers. The BLS is also fielding the American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module and the CPS Work Schedules Supplement in 2024, both of which contain questions about telework. Again, both sources will provide statistics from the perspective of workers rather than employers. The BLS Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS) data provide occupational information regarding cognitive and mental requirements that include whether civilian workers in an occupation have the ability to telework. ORS defines the ability to telework in an occupation as a formal telework arrangement at an establishment for all employees within the occupation, and excludes temporary or ad hoc arrangements, such as those made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ Establishment level data on telework is not included in the ORS. QBS telework data provide a broader picture of establishment telework practices, be they formal or informal in nature, as well as future expectations regarding changes in telework policies. The data also can be compared to the 2022 QBS data, which will allow users to see how business practices have changed.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

The QBS is designed to provide information that is representative of establishments nationwide, and surveying smaller firms will be necessary to fulfill information needs. Respondent burden will be minimized using online reporting and by keeping the questionnaire short, restricting questions to generally available information, and utilizing questions specifically developed for simplicity of understanding and ease of completion.

6. Describe the consequences to federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

³ <https://lehd.ces.census.gov/>

⁴ https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/ors_11172022.htm

The QBS allows the BLS to be more responsive to the changing needs of its stakeholders and the public. Each survey under the QBS is a survey meant to capture data for a specific point in time. The results of each survey will be of interest to a wide variety of data users interested in the current economic situation. This information could help inform policy or legislative, budgetary, and planning decisions for existing programs and could also help develop new programs to support U.S. businesses.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

- **requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**
- **requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**
- **requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**
- **requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**
- **in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**
- **requiring the use of statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**
- **that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or**
- **requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.**

QBS data will be collected in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5 with one exception. Responses are requested in fewer than 30 days. Upon completion of the ARS, respondents are asked to immediately complete the QBS. ARS-ineligible sample members are asked to respond within 14 days. Due to the nature of the QBS, data are intended to be collected quickly to inform the public in as timely a manner as possible. Data collection efforts are expected to take 8-12 weeks.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the *Federal Register* of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years -- even if the collection-of-information activity is the same as in prior periods. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained.

Federal Register Notice

No comments were received as a result of the Federal Register notice published on January 11, 2024 (89 FR 1944).

Outside Consultation

BLS has reviewed the Small Business Pulse survey conducted by the Census Bureau. BLS has also collaborated with the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, the Small Business Administration, the Employment and Training Administration, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, with the goal of including topics of broad interest and minimizing potential redundancy across agencies. Telework, hiring practices, and vacancy rates were severely impacted by the pandemic, and there is great interest in understanding whether those changes were temporary or more permanent in nature. Asking identical questions two years later will lead to a better understanding of both short-term and long-term impacts on businesses.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

There will be no gifts or payments to respondents.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

The Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) safeguards the confidentiality of individually identifiable information acquired under a pledge of confidentiality for exclusively statistical purposes by controlling access to, and uses made of, such information. CIPSEA includes fines and penalties for any knowing and willful disclosure of individually identifiable information by an officer, employee, or agent of the BLS.

The QBS protects the confidentiality of respondent provided data based on CIPSEA and provides respondents with a confidentiality (or CIPSEA) pledge stating that the data will be protected from unauthorized disclosure and used for statistical purposes only. The standard BLS confidentiality pledge/informed consent statement will appear on the welcome screen of the QBS collection instrument:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, its employees, agents, and partner statistical agencies, will use the information you provide for statistical purposes only and will hold the information in confidence to the full extent permitted by law. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (44 USC 3572) and other applicable Federal laws, your responses will not be disclosed in identifiable form without your informed consent.

BLS policy on confidentiality states: “Respondent Identifiable Information acquired or maintained by the BLS for exclusively statistical purposes and under a pledge of confidentiality shall be treated in a manner that ensures the information will be used only for statistical purposes and will be accessible only to authorized individuals with a need-to-know.”

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

No sensitive questions will be asked during the survey.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should:

- **Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. Unless directed to do so, agencies should not conduct special surveys to obtain information on which to base hour burden estimates. Consultation with a sample (fewer than 10) of potential respondents is desirable. If the hour burden on respondents is expected to vary widely because of differences in activity, size, or complexity, show the range of estimated hour burden, and explain the reasons for the variance. General, estimates should not include burden hours for customary and usual business practices.**
- **If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form**
- **Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories. The cost of contracting out or paying outside parties for information collection activities should not be included here. Instead, this cost should be included in Item 14.**

Estimated Annualized Respondent Cost and Hour Burden

Activity	No. of Respondents	No. of Responses per Respondent	Total Responses	Average Burden (Hours)	Total Burden (Hours)	Hourly Wage Rate	Total Burden Cost
QBS-2024-1	80,000	1	80,000	5/60	6667	\$32.38	\$215,878

In general, questionnaire completion time is estimated to average 5 minutes. The estimated burden of 5 minutes per respondent was calculated based on the 2022 QBS. Therefore, the total estimated burden for the 2024 questionnaire is expected to be 6,667 hours.

The cost to respondents is based on employer costs for wages, salaries, and benefits for Office and Administrative Support occupations and was obtained from the BLS National Compensation Survey, Employer Costs for Employee Compensation program. This rate was \$32.38/hour based on September 2023 data. (https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/ecec_12152023.pdf).

- Total cost to respondents for the 2024 QBS is expected to be \$215,878.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).

- **The cost estimate should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start up cost component (annualized over its expected useful life); and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of service component. The estimates should take into account costs associated with generating, maintaining, and disclosing or providing the information. Include descriptions of methods used to estimate major cost factors including system and technology acquisition, expected useful life of capital equipment, the discount rate(s), and the time period over which costs will be incurred. Capital and start-up costs include, among other items, preparations for collecting information such as purchasing computers and software; monitoring, sampling, drilling and testing equipment; and record storage facilities.**
- **If cost estimates are expected to vary widely, agencies should present ranges of cost burdens and explain the reasons for the variance. The cost of purchasing or contracting out information collection services should be a part of this cost burden estimate. In developing cost burden estimates, agencies may consult with a sample of respondents (fewer than 10), utilize the 60-day pre-OMB submission public comment process and use existing economic or regulatory impact analysis associated with the rulemaking containing the information collection, as appropriate.**
- **Generally, estimates should not include purchases of equipment or services, or portions thereof, made: (1) prior to October 1, 1995, (2) to achieve regulatory compliance with requirements not associated with the information collection, (3) for reasons other than to provide information or keep records for the government, or (4) as part of customary and usual business or private practices.**

There are no capital/start-up costs or operation and maintenance and purchase of service costs resulting from the collection of this information.

14. Provide estimates of the annualized cost to the Federal Government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 into a single table.

The estimated cost to the Federal government for the QBS is approximately \$0.4 million. This includes collecting and processing survey microdata, evaluating data quality, and developing statistical weights and estimation, and preparing and publishing a news release.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

Each QBS survey is expected to address a particular event, or labor market issue and is expected to be unique in its concept and execution. As such, the sample and scope will be determined based on the topic. For this reason, each QBS survey will require a unique burden assessment each time it is fielded.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulations, and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

BLS will follow standard practices and procedures for publication and dissemination of the results of all QBS surveys. For the 2024 survey, BLS will follow the publication processes established for the 2021 and 2022 Business Response Surveys with a news release and dedicated pages on the BLS public website; www.bls.gov/brs is the home page for all QBS data. This public page includes tabs for published data tables, charts, technical notes and methodology, and other relevant information. BLS will promote the release on the BLS website and in social media in accordance with standard practices. BLS will also highlight the data through additional publications on the website such as The Economics Daily⁵ and Spotlight on Statistics.⁶

The timetable for publication of the results of each QBS survey will be dependent on when the survey is approved and in the field. Once the survey is in the field, data collection is estimated to take approximately 8-12 weeks, and data review and publication activities would take approximately 2-3 months. Publication can be expected roughly 4-6 months after data collection begins. The current goal for publication of the 2024 survey is December 2024, though this timeline is subject to change.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

Approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval is not being sought.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2023/more-than-half-of-establishments-with-job-vacancies-in-2021-22-had-fewer-than-10-employees.htm>

⁶ <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2023/business-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/home.htm>

Attachments

2024-1 QBS questionnaire (Attachment1.pdf)

2024-1 QBS web screens (Attachment2.pdf)

2024-1 QBS email template for ARS-ineligible respondents (Attachment3.pdf)

2024-1 QBS follow-up email template for ARS-ineligible respondents (Attachment4.pdf)

2024-1 QBS password email template for ARS-ineligible respondents (Attachment5.pdf)

2024-1 QBS web letter for ARS-ineligible respondents (Attachment6.pdf)