U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
OMB Information Collection Request
Business Trends and Outlook Survey
OMB Control Number 0607-1022

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

BTOS uses ongoing data collection to produce high frequency, timely, and granular information about current economic conditions and trends. BTOS is the only biweekly business tendency survey produced by the federal statistical system, providing unique and detailed data during times of economic or other emergencies. The BTOS initial target population is all nonfarm employer businesses with receipts of $1,000 or more in the United States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The current sample consists of approximately 1.2 million businesses split into six panels. Data collection occurs every two weeks, and businesses in each panel are asked to report once every 12 weeks for one year. Current data from BTOS are representative of employer businesses (excluding farms) in the U.S. economy and are published every two weeks. The data are available at the national and state levels, in addition to the 25 most-populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) sector, subsector, and state by sector are also published, as are employment size class, and sector by employment size class data, according to the same timeline.

The total universe of employer businesses is approximately 5.8 million businesses. The total estimated sample size is 1.2 million businesses. The sample is selected using a stratified systematic random sample stratified by state and 2-digit NAICS sector. Some small state and sector strata are collapsed to provide adequate sample size. Each sampled business is systematically assigned to one of six bi-weekly panels to create a twelve-week wave. Each panel of approximately 196,300 businesses 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 receive an email; otherwise, they receive a letter. The sample of 1.2 million businesses are used for one year and a new sample of 1.2 million businesses are produced annually. This minimizes respondent burden, while also providing the data needed to produce

detailed estimates by sector, state, state by sector, sub-sector, the largest twenty-five Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) by population size, employment size, and employer status. The Census Bureau plans to continuously collect data every two weeks indefinitely.

The Census Bureau included multi-unit businesses beginning with the second sample selected (that is, beginning in year two of data collection). The total number of businesses sampled for BTOS remains at 1.2 million. The sample contains approximately 60,000 multi-unit businesses and the number of single location businesses was reduced by approximately 60,000 to maintain the same overall sample size. The methods used to select the sample remain the same and no additional methodological changes are proposed for BTOS.

2. Procedures for Collecting Information

The BTOS has continuous bi-weekly data collection. Businesses are contacted via email based on known email addresses that have been collected across Census Bureau economic programs. Businesses with no known email address are contacted via physical letter sent to the address included in the business frame, the Business Register. The sample is split so that approximately 196,300 different respondents are selected bi-weekly to reduce burden and survey fatigue.

Each yearly sample collection for BTOS consists of four cycles. Each cycle is split into 6 bi-weekly collection periods (1-6). Each selected respondent is assigned to one of the 6 collection periods within each cycle and receives the survey during that collection period in each of the four cycles. Therefore, each respondent receives the questionnaire four times in the collection sample year. The first cycle, businesses are contacted either by email or letter with an invitation to respond to the survey. For the first cycle, initial letters are sent on the Friday before the 2-week period while initial emails are sent on the first Monday of the 2-week period. Starting with the second cycle, businesses are contacted only by email with an invitation to respond to the survey. Both letter and email invitations describe the purpose of the survey collection, include the link to the online reporting tool, and contain the access code.

Invitations to respond to the BTOS describe the purpose of the survey collection and contain the secure credentials that link to the unique Census Bureau business identifier. The website address directs 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 maintains the electronic collection infrastructure, which includes a welcome screen, a progress bar, 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 respondents are presented with the questionnaire.

3. Efforts to Maximize Response

The BTOS landing page addresses the legitimacy of the collection and includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Additionally, respondents are provided service via email by staff from the Census Bureau Headquarters.

The Census Bureau expects a response rate of approximately 30% based on response rates from previous years of the Business Trends and Outlook Survey. Methods to Maximize Response
The Census Bureau has put in a place the following to maximize response:

- Respondents 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 do not require accessing business records.

- A large panel sample is split over 12 weeks so that businesses only receive one survey request every twelve weeks. Each panel sample will only be used for approximately a year (52 or 53 weeks), so businesses receive a survey request four or five times per year while in sample.
- Near real-time BTOS survey results displayed on the dashboard may generate interest in the products and motivate response.

4. Tests of Procedures or Methods

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.

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

5. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection

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

James W. Hunt, Methodology Director
Retail, Wholesale, and Services Programs
Economic Statistical Methods Division
301-763-6599
james.w.hunt@census.gov

Roberta Kurec, Branch Chief
Cross Sector Surveys Statistical Methods Branch
Economic Statistical Methods Division
301-763-4690
roberta.kurec@census.gov

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

Catherine Buffington
Chief, Economic Indicators Division
301-763-1838

Attachments

A. Draft core content with supplemental content (cycle 2)
B. Draft core content (cycle 1,3,4)