Generic Information Collection Request:
Usability evaluation for the 2022 Annual Business Survey

Request: 1The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). The Census Bureau plans to conduct pretesting activities for the online 2022 Annual Business Survey (ABS) instrument.

The ABS is conducted annually as a supplement to the economic census collected by the Census Bureau and sponsored by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The ABS provides a detailed, regularly collected source of data on the status, nature, and scope of women-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses. The ABS provides estimates for the number of employer firms, sales and receipts, annual payroll, and employment by owners' gender, ethnicity, race, and veteran status. The ABS also provides information on research and development activity and cost for businesses with 1-9 employees and includes survey questions to measure business innovation in firms of all sizes. For the 2022 ABS, estimates will be available for the U.S., states, and select metropolitan statistical areas (MSA). Among other uses, the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) use results from the ABS to assess business assistance needs and allocate available program resources. Data collected on research and development and innovation may be used to compare R&D costs across industries, determine where R&D activity is conducted geographically, and identify the types of businesses with R&D, to contribute to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) system of national accounts; to increase investments in research and development, strengthen education, and encourage entrepreneurship; and to compare U.S. business innovation with innovation in other countries, including those in the European Union.

The ABS is primarily collected via a self-administered questionnaire using the Census Bureau's online survey reporting system. Respondents are mailed a letter informing them of the requirement to complete the survey and providing them with access information. A preview of the questionnaire is available for respondents to download to review the survey questions and instructions. For more information regarding ABS:
https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/abs.html

Purpose: The ABS asks questions about the business owner(s) as well as various characteristics about the business. The 2022 ABS will be conducted via a self-administered Web only method for all businesses. The data collection instrument requires pretesting to evaluate the instrument prior to its release. In addition, pretesting will help inform user centered design ensuring that key functions are available within the instrument, making it easy for respondents to understand and report. Additional objectives for the evaluation of the online 2022 ABS instrument include the following:

- Identify areas of the instrument that are problematic for users
- Identify instructions/features that are difficult for users to understand

- Provide recommendations for improvements to the design of the instrument that will enhance its usability

The results from the usability evaluation will be recorded and tabulated and a report produced that outlines the findings of the pretest and recommendations for improvement.

Population of Interest: Sample members from the 2019 and 2020 ABS. As well as having answered the questions for technology or innovation, businesses should be representative of all business sizes and cover a variety of industries.

Timeline: Testing will be conducted in May 2023.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: We will conduct one round of usability interviews with up to 15 respondents in order to evaluate the online instrument. We will conduct interviews over Microsoft Teams and travel is required for the usability testing.

Sample: We plan to conduct up to 20 usability interviews. We plan to conduct usability interviews with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of businesses. This number of interviews was selected because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover target companies, and should be large enough to provide reactions to the survey instrument in order to identify meaningful findings.

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited using the sample files from the 2019 and 2020 ABS. Participants will be recruited via email. Once interviews are scheduled, researchers will send participants a confirmation email. Before beginning the interviews, we will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential under Title 13. Researchers will confirm that the respondents have read, understand, and agree to the contents of the consent form (see Attachment C).

Protocol: A copy of a draft interview protocol is enclosed. Sessions for the usability evaluation will be conducted in person. Participants will be asked to complete the ABS online instrument. We anticipate all sessions will take less than 60 minutes to complete.

Use of incentive: Monetary incentives for participation will not be offered.

Below is a list of materials to be used in the current study:

Attachment A: Draft protocol used to outline how the research study will be conducted
Attachment B: Instrument screenshots to illustrate features of the instrument that are being evaluated
Attachment C: Consent form to obtain participant consent for participant and recording of the session
Attachment D: 2022 ABS questions

Length of interview: For usability interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 60 minutes (20 cases x 60 minutes per case = 20 hours). Additionally, to recruit respondents we expect to make up to 5 email contacts per completed case. The recruiting emails are expected to take on average 3 minutes to read (5 attempted emails per completed case x 20 cases x 3 minute per case = 5 hours). Thus, the estimated burden is 25 hours (20 hours for interviews + 5 hours recruiting).

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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