

## **Generic Information Collection Request: Cognitive testing for the 2024 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 2024 Annual Business Survey (ABS).

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 2023 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 US 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 2024 ABS cognitive testing will include new potential questions. The types of questions are listed below:

- **Sustainability Management** – addresses how the operation of a business is affected by demands from consumers, other businesses, and the government to meet the needs of present and future generations and the environment.
- **Technology Transfer** – asks about the development, purchase, or exchange of technologies and /or intellectual properties.
- **Labor Related Questions** – seeks to determine opportunities for workers where there are unions vs non-unions and business owners experience with the unions.
- **Reshoring** – asks wheather and for what reasons the business plans to move operations

from another country to the United States

- **Research and Development** - collects information on research and development activity from businesses with W-2 employment between 1 and 9.
- **Entrepreneurship Questions** – asks about the motivation for owning the business
- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** – asks about the sexual orientation and gender identity of the owners of the business

The results from the cognitive testing will be recorded and a report produced that outlines the findings of the pretest and recommendations for improvement to questions. This report will be shared with OMB ahead of the proposed information collection request for the 2024 ABS. This report will include:

- Understanding how respondents comprehend specific questions
- Identifying respondents' use of records and/or estimation strategies for answering specific questions
- Assessing the respondent's ability to answer specific questions
- Identifying difficulties in completing the questionnaire
- Recommended changes to questions and response options to be implemented in the 2024 ABS

**Population of Interest:** Sample members from the 2020, 2021, and 2022 ABS. Businesses should be representative of all business sizes and cover a variety of industries.

**Timeline:** Testing will be conducted from July through September 2023.

**Language:** Testing will be conducted in English only.

**Method:** We will conduct cognitive interviews with up to 40 respondents across two rounds of iterative testing in order to evaluate and refine the new and revised questions. These interviews will be conducted via Microsoft teams. A blank draft of the proposed 2024 ABS questions will be emailed to scheduled respondents prior to the interviews. During the interviews, respondents will view only one or two individual modules (see Attachments B, C, D, E, F, G, and H). Interviews will be conducted by researchers from the Data Collection Methodology and Research Branch. Special Sworn Status staff from the NCSES and/or Economic Reimbursable Division may observe if available. We will use probes (see Attachment A) to assess respondents' understanding of the questions and the flow of the questionnaire.

We will also conduct online unmoderated cognitive testing via the Qualtrics platform with up to 200 respondents total. Our unmoderated testing goals are as follows: 50 respondents for the labor related questions, 50 respondents for the reshoring questions, and 100 respondents for the sexual orientation and gender identity questions. These respondents will be asked to fill out a limited number of probes from the cognitive interviewing protocol (see Attachment A).

All participants will be informed that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be seen only by Census Bureau employees and those with special

sworn status (see Attachment I).

**Sample:** We plan to conduct a maximum of 240 interviews – cognitive interviews combined with online testing via Qualtrics. We plan to conduct 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 questions in order to identify meaningful findings.

**Recruitment:** 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 I).

**Protocol:** A copy of a draft interview protocol and a draft questionnaire for testing purposes are enclosed (see Attachment A).

Cognitive interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. Participants will be asked to read the draft ABS questions. Probes will be asked concurrently. We anticipate all sessions will take 60 minutes to complete, and only one participant will be interviewed at a time.

Online testing will be conducted via Qualtrics. Participants will be asked to read the draft ABS questions and to answer a few probes from the protocol. We anticipate all sessions will take up to 30 minutes to complete.

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

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

**Attachment A:** 2024 ABS Cognitive Testing Protocol Draft

**Attachment B:** Sustainability Management Module Draft

**Attachment C:** Technology Transfer Module Draft

**Attachment D:** Labor Related Questions Draft

**Attachment E:** Reshoring Questions Draft

**Attachment F:** Research and Development Questions Draft

**Attachment G:** Entrepreneurship Questions Draft

**Attachment H:** Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Questions Draft

**Attachment I:** Consent Form

**Length of interview:** We expect that each cognitive interview will last no more than 60 minutes (40 cases x 60 minutes per case = 40 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 40 cases x 3 minute per case = 10 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for the cognitive interview portion of this project is 50

hours (40 hours for interviews + 10 hours for recruiting). The online testing instrument will be administered to 200 respondents and will take up to 30 minutes to complete. This results in a total burden of 100 hours for online testing. The total burden for all testing is 150 hours.

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

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