Generic Information Collection Request:
Exploratory Research for the Commodity Flow Survey

Request: The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725) for the Commodity Flow Survey (CFS).

The CFS is administered every 5 years through a partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). It provides data on the movement of goods in the United States including commodities shipped, their value, weight, and mode of transportation, as well as the origin and destination of shipments of commodities from manufacturing, mining, wholesale, and selected retail and services establishments. These data are used by policy makers and transportation planners to evaluate the demand for transportation facilities and services, energy use, and safety risk and environmental concerns. Additionally, the data collected from the CFS are also used to analyze trends in the movement of goods, mapping spatial patterns of commodity and vehicle flows, forecasting demands for the movement of goods, and determining needs for associated infrastructure and equipment.

Further information regarding the Commodity Flow Survey can be found at this website: https://www.census.gov/econ/cfs/ .

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics is interested in learning more about respondents' records as they relate to the cost of shipping. To address this, researchers will ask exploratory questions of respondents to the CFS to explore how accessible shipping cost data is, how respondents gather the relevant information, and what burden may be associated with that retrieval process.

To better understand how records are kept related to shipping costs, staff from the Data Collection Methodology & Research Branch (DCMRB) within the Economic Statistical Methods Division (ESMD) of the Census Bureau will be conducting exploratory moderated cognitive interviews along with unmoderated testing.

This project will explore the following research questions:

- How accessible is data related to cost of shipment for CFS respondents?
- What is the level of difficulty in obtaining the data?
- How is this shipping information maintained? (at establishment or company level?)
- What departments would need to be involved to gather the data?
- Are companies using in-house shippers, contracted couriers/carriers, or both?
- What is the approximate burden of obtaining the shipment cost data?

Purpose: This research will determine if respondents are able to provide shipping cost data, how the data are maintained, and if respondents have difficulty providing the data. Researchers would like to determine the level of effort in responding to questions about shipping costs in the Commodity Flow Survey. A report and supporting presentation will be developed that outlines the findings and recommendations for improvement.

Population of Interest: U.S. companies that ship goods, across a variety of sizes, industries, and locations.

Timeline: Testing will run from February through April 2024.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: The method of research will be both moderated cognitive interviews and unmoderated testing. Respondents will be asked about their ability to provide shipping cost data, and any difficulties they may have reporting the data.

The unmoderated testing will be up to 60 self-administered questionnaires completed via Qualtrics (Attachment A). DCMRB staff will periodically evaluate the findings and make changes to the questionnaire when necessary. The moderated cognitive interviews (Attachment B) will be conducted over Microsoft Teams (or telephone). Attachment C contains the consent form. Attachment D contains screenshots of the CFS instrument. Subject area specialists from the Census Bureau and BTS with special sworn status will observe some of the cognitive interviews.

Sample: We plan to collect a maximum of 60 unmoderated responses and to conduct approximately 20 moderated interviews. This sample will yield a suitable, broad representation of U.S. businesses for the exploratory research.

This number of responses was selected because it is a manageable number for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover target companies, and should be large enough to identify meaningful findings.

The sampling frame for these interviews comes from a list of companies that have submitted data to the 2022 CFS. Participants will be informed that participation in this exploratory research is voluntary.

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited using a list of respondents to the 2022 CFS. Before beginning the interviews, participants will be informed that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential under Title 13. Respondents will be recruited via email.

Protocols: The protocol for the unmoderated portion of the study is enclosed (see Attachment A). We anticipate that each unmoderated response will take 15-20 minutes to complete. We anticipate that the moderated portion of the study (see Attachment B) will take about 1 hour per session.

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

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

1. **Attachment A:** <u>CFS Unmoderated</u> <u>Protocol</u> used to outline how the unmoderated portion of the research study will be conducted
2. **Attachment B:** <u>CFS Moderated</u> <u>Protocol</u> used to outline how the moderated portion of the research study will be conducted
3. **Attachment C:** <u>Consent Form</u> to obtain participant consent for participation in the exploratory research session
4. **Attachment D:** <u>2022 CFS Survey Screenshots</u> to illustrate the affiliated survey
5. **Attachment E:** <u>Recruitment Emails</u> used to invite participants to the study

Length of interview: For the moderated cognitive interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 1 hour (20 cases x 1 hour per case = 20 hours). To recruit participants we expect to reach out via email up to 2 times per completed case. The emails are expected to take on average 2 minutes to read and act upon (2 email contacts per completed case x 20 cases x 2 minutes per case = 1.5 hours). For the unmoderated testing, we expect that each response will take no more than 20 minutes (60 cases x 20 minutes per case = 20 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for this research is 41.5 hours (21.5 hours for moderated cognitive interviews + 20 hours for unmoderated testing).

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

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