

Generic Information Collection Request: Usability Evaluation 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 online 2024 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.

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 will be conducted via a self-administered web-only method for all businesses. The ABS survey website is moving to an updated look and feel. This testing will focus exclusively on Section E: *Research Activities at Nonprofit Organizations*, as this section has never undergone usability testing. This section of the ABS collects information on the research performed and/or funded by the organization. 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 2024 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 respondents from the 2022 and 2023 ABS. Participants will

work for nonprofit organizations.

Timeline: Testing will be conducted in May 2024.

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. Participants will be instructed to share their screen with researchers so that their interactions with the survey website can be observed. The interviews will follow a semi-structured interview protocol (Attachment A) that includes a suite of tasks designed to assess the usability of the instrument by having respondents complete actions they would need to complete during actual data collection. Answers to any data entry tasks will be provided to the participant so the focus of the tasks will remain on navigation and interacting with the website and not data retrieval. Attachment B contains screenshots of the production instrument that the participants will be evaluating.

Sample: We plan to conduct up to 15 usability interviews. 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. We plan to conduct usability interviews with nonprofit organizations.

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited using the sample files from the 2022 and 2023 ABS. Participants will be recruited via email. Once interviews are scheduled, researchers will send participants a confirmation email. Before beginning the interviews, participants are informed 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 the interview protocol is enclosed (see Attachment A). Participants will be asked to complete a portion of 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: 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 participating in the session

Attachment D: 2022 ABS Survey

Length of interview: For usability interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 60 minutes (15 cases x 60 minutes per case = 15 hours).

Additionally, 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 15 cases x 2 minutes per case = 1 hour). Thus, the estimated burden is 16 hours (15 hours for interviews + 1 hour 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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