2023 AIES E-Commerce Exploratory Interviewing Protocol

Purpose:

Researchers in the Census Bureau's Economic Statistical Methods Division (ESMD) and Economy-Wide Statistics Division (EWD), and with RTI International, will conduct exploratory interviewing to investigate the record-keeping practices and data accessibility of e-Commerce economic activity at respondent businesses.

These interviews will cover three main topics: record-keeping practices regarding e-Commerce activity; data accessibility of records related to e-Commerce; and current e-Commerce reporting practices on the AIES. Not all questions in this protocol will pertain to all participants, and some modules are optional depending on the length of the interview and firm characteristics. Numbered questions are priorities, and bulleted questions underneath are optional probes.

Research Questions: The research will be guided by the following research questions:

1. **What are the current e-Commerce record-keeping practices of businesses?**
   - What is included or excluded in these records?
   - What are the differences in record keeping by firm industry(ies)?
   - What are the differences in record keeping by firm size and complexity?
   - At what level of granularity are these records kept?
2. **How accessible are records of e-Commerce activity?**
   - How easy or challenging is accessing this information?
   - How many people at the business are involved in maintenance and pulling of e-Commerce records for reporting?
   - Are there levels of granularity that are more or less accessible for respondents (e.g., establishment-level compared to industry- or company-wide level)?
3. **How do current e-Commerce record keeping practices inform current reporting practices on the AIES?**
   - What are respondents currently including (and excluding) from reporting e-Commerce for AIES?
   - How much data manipulation (aggregation, allocation, estimation, and others) do respondents engage in to report e-Commerce for AIES?
   - What are the factors that determine decision to report e-Commerce on the AIES?

Informed Consent: Respondents will be asked to complete a consent form electronically before the time of the interview.

Materials Needed:
- Electronically signed consent form
- Respondent recruitment and firm information, including: Contact info; establishments in manufacturing; single/multi-units; number of establishments; number of industries
- Current AIES harmonized E-Commerce question text

Method: We will conduct the interviews by Microsoft Teams (or phone).

Expected length of interview: 1 hour (60 minutes) maximum

General probes that may be used throughout the interview:

- Were these data easy to access?

- What else can you tell me about this?

- Can you tell me more about that?

- How confident are you in that response?

- What looked unclear or is confusing here?

Introduction (5 minutes)

If necessary: You should have received a link to a consent form from our recruiter via email. Did you have a chance to review and sign that yet?

> [IF YES] Did you have any questions about any of the information presented there?

> [IF NO] Please open up the link now and review the form, then sign it. Take your time and let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today!

I am working with the Census Bureau to better understand the record-keeping practices and data accessibility of e-Commerce activities at your business.

My job is to improve questions on our economic surveys, and particularly on the Annual Integrated Economic Survey - the AIES – with which you may or may not be familiar. I didn't write the survey questions, so you do not have to hold back when telling me your feedback. Please be candid and frank in your responses. Our interview is being conducted under the authority of Title 13, which means that your responses are confidential, and neither your name nor the name or identifying information about your company will be included in any of our findings.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

I'd like to record our session today so that when I go to analyze the results of these interviews, I can use the recording to pick up on anything I may have missed in my notes. Do I have your permission to record our session today?

> [Turn on recording]

[State respondent ID number and date, repeat consent on recording: Do you agree to participate in the interview today? Is it okay if I record our conversation?]

Topic 1: Definitions and Record-Keeping Practices

Module 1: Warm up (5 minutes)
Universe: All participants

1. What is your role in the company?

2. What is your role in the process for responding to Census Bureau surveys in general? How long have you been in this role?
   - How do you find the data you need to answer Census Bureau surveys?
     i. Do you work with anyone else to get the data you need?
     ii. Do you access any reports to get the data you need?
   - How easy or difficult is it for you to find all the data you need for Census Bureau surveys? Why is that?
   - How easy or difficult is it for you to enter the data into the survey once you have the answers you need? Why is that?
3. Tell me a little bit about your business. What types of goods or services does this business provide?

Module 2: Definitions (5 minutes)
Universe: All participants

1. Let's think about the word "e-Commerce" – what is e-Commerce, in your own words?
   - How can you tell if a transaction is e-Commerce or not?
   - What does this include? What does it exclude?
2. Does your firm engage in e-Commerce?
   - In what ways does your firm engage in e-Commerce (i.e., what are some examples)?
   - What were you thinking about as you answered that question? What did you include or exclude?

[Interviewer instruction: if participant is not familiar with e-Commerce, or indicates that their firm is not engaging in e-Commerce, skip to Module 5].

Module 3: Record-Keeping Practices (20 minutes)
Universe: All participants that indicated e-Commerce activities

1. Tell me about how your company tracks your e-Commerce activities – what is included in this tracking?
   - What types of activities are included, and from what sources?
   - What products or services are included in your company's e-Commerce records? What is excluded?
   - With what frequency are e-Commerce records updated?

- How confident are you that there is internal consistency with what is recorded as e-Commerce?

2. Are your e-Commerce records kept separately from other types of records?
    - If yes, how are they maintained separately? Can you tell me more about that?
    - If no, how can you tell e-Commerce from other types of records? Can you tell me more about that?
3. Are your e-Commerce records kept differently for different parts of your company?
    - That is, do you track this information differently for different parts of your company? If so, how?
    - How are these differences reflected in your records?
4. At what level are you tracking e-Commerce at your company, that is, what is the lowest level of granularity you can access?
    - For example, can you provide e-Commerce revenue for each location at your company?
    - Can you provide e-Commerce revenue for groups of locations that make or do the same thing?
    - Can you provide e-Commerce revenue for your company as a whole?
    - How do you determine "where" to track e-Commerce activities? That is, if an order is placed online, how is it recorded in your records relative to your physical locations?

Topic 2: Data Accessibility

Module 4: Accessibility of E-Commerce Records (10 minutes)
Universe: All participants that indicated e-Commerce activities

1. Now that I have a better understanding of what you are tracking at your company, I'm wondering about how easy or difficult it is to access those records. Will you please describe for me how you go about accessing your e-Commerce records?
2. Can you access the databases where these records are kept on your own, or do you have to rely on others within your company? How many other people are involved?
3. Are there levels of granularity that are more accessible than others for e-Commerce, and how does that vary for your company?
    - For example, is it easier to access e-Commerce for each of the locations at your company, for groups of locations that do or make the same things, or for your company overall?
    - If you wanted data at the location level, would you have a central location to get those data or would you need to reach out to each location, or something else? Please describe the process of getting location-level e-Commerce data if available.
    - Who is the ideal point of contact to get data about e-Commerce for your company overall? How about for each location at your company?

Topic 3: Reporting E-Commerce
Module 5: E-Commerce Reporting Practices on the AIES (15 minutes)
Universe: All participants

Ok, let's talk about how you are currently reporting e-Commerce at your business. [Interviewer note: share current AIES e-Commerce question and response instructions].

1. Take a minute to read over this question and then tell me in your own words what we are asking here.
   - What surprises you, if anything, about this question or the additional instructional information about this question?
   - Have you seen a question like this before, and if so, do you remember how you went about answering it?
   - [Interviewer note: if participant indicated that their firm does not engage in e-Commerce or did not know what e-Commerce is] Does seeing the question change whether or not your company engages in e-Commerce? Why or why not?
2. How would you go about answering this question? What would be your first step, and then what?
   - Would you need to reach out to anyone else in your company, and if so, who?
   - How much time do you think it would take you to answer this question, and why?
3. How easy or difficult would it be to answer this question based on the records you have available?
   - Would you need to add, allocate, estimate, or otherwise manipulate your data to fit the question?
   - How easy or difficult would these calculations be? How much time do you think it would take you?
   - How close to the way you keep your records is this question?
   - Are there things we are including or excluding that do not match how you keep your records? If so, how would you reconcile that?
4. How likely are you to provide a response to this question?
   - Why did you answer that way? What were you thinking about?
   - How can we make it easier for you to report your e-Commerce activities?
   - What do you think would happen if you declined to respond to this question?
5. Other than AIES, are there other places where you are reporting e-Commerce?
   - Are there internal reports you run about your e-Commerce, and for who at the company or for what purpose?
   - Are there other instances of external reporting – like for taxes, or for shareholders, or for regulatory reasons – that you are reporting e-Commerce? If so, tell me about them – is it easier or more difficult than reporting to this question and why?

Wrap up/Debriefing (5 minutes)
Universe: All participants

1. That's all the questions I have for you today! Is there anything else we did not talk about today that we should be thinking about? Do you have any other comments, questions, or suggestions for us?

Thank you so much for your time today.