

Generic Information Collection Request: Respondent Debriefing Interviewing for the Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS)

Request: The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). We will be conducting respondent debriefing interviews to learn more about how respondents completed the one-time supplement on the topic of Work from Home for the Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS). In addition, we plan to probe respondents about their reaction to potentially changing the two-week reference period to a one-month reference period in the future.

The Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS) collects qualitative survey responses every two weeks from a representative sample of all single location, non-farm businesses in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. This high frequency program produces timely, granular data products that provide measures of business conditions and outlook and capture how extensive the impact on businesses events such as economic downturns or adverse weather events are. As economic and other conditions change, businesses are faced with new challenges and opportunities; if successfully tested, newly proposed content may help address data gaps for these emerging issues. For more information about the Business Trends and Outlook Survey, see: [Business Trends and Outlook Survey \(BTOS\) \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/business-trends-and-outlook-survey)

Purpose: While the pandemic propelled Work from Home (WFH), WFH continues post-pandemic to be an important mode of work. Just how prevalent is not clear since measures of WFH have varied across surveys and other collections (see for example, Abraham et al. 2024¹, Barrero et al. 2023², and Brynjolfsson et al 2023³). The Census Bureau has long collected information on WFH on demographic surveys but only recently began collecting this information on business surveys. The Census Bureau, with input from a team of experts on this topic, added a one-time supplement to the Business Trends and Outlook Survey as a way to measure Work from Home. It is hoped that this data, combined with currently collected demographic and business data on WFH, will help to produce a more comprehensive and complete picture of Work from Home.

The purpose of conducting respondent debriefings on the Work from Home supplemental questions for the BTOS is to assess whether the questions are measuring the underlying constructs of interest and to better understand the accessibility of the requested data and the burden of compiling responses to the questions. The feedback from these interviews will be used to assist in analysis and determine whether a future supplement on this topic would be useful. It may also be used to help inform future decisions about collecting such data in other business surveys.

The proposal to change the two-week reference period to a one-month reference period is based

¹ Abraham Katherine G, Mohammad Ashoori, Aref Darzi, Nathalie Gonzalez-Prieto, John C. Haltiwanger, Aliakbar Kabiri, and Erkut Y. Ozbay (2024). "Local Variation in Onsite Work during the Pandemic and its Aftermath," NBER Working Paper 32042.

² Barrero José María, Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis (2023). "The Evolution of Work from Home," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 37(4), 23–50.

³ Brynjolfsson, Erik, John J. Horton, Christos Makridis, Alexandre Mas, Adam Ozimek, Daniel Rock, and Hong-Yi TuYe (2023). "How Many Americans Work Remotely? A Survey of Surveys and Their Measurement Issues," NBER Working Paper 31193.

on the need to better align with business bookkeeping practices while still allowing us to capture an economic baseline. Based on previous respondent research, we suspect that the one-month reference period may align better with common business recordkeeping practices, thus reducing respondent burden. In the event of an emergency or when more frequent data is necessary, the BTOS would revert to a bi-weekly or even weekly reference period, ensuring that we can quickly adapt to specific data collection needs when needed.

Results: The results from the respondent debriefings will be documented in a report, focusing on:

- Understanding how respondents comprehended the Work from Home supplement questions
- Identifying respondents' use of records and/or estimation strategies for answering these questions
- Assessing respondents' ability to answer these questions/difficulties in completing the questionnaire (where applicable)
- Identifying issues to be considered in analysis of the supplement data
- Respondent reactions to proposed wording changes that reflect a one month reference period

Population of Interest: Respondents from single and multi-unit businesses across all sectors.

Timeline: Testing will be conducted during January – February, 2025.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: Staff from the Data Collection and Methodology Branch plan to conduct up to 20 moderated interviews over Microsoft Teams/telephone, over one round of interviewing. (Note that updates may be made to the test materials after a subset of interviews are completed.) The interviewers will follow a semi-structured interview protocol (Attachment A). Interviewers will send a link to the survey instrument to respondents prior to calling so that respondents can review the survey questions while on the phone. The survey will be hosted through the Qualtrics online survey platform. Interviews will be recorded if the respondent consents.

Sample: We plan to conduct a maximum of 20 moderated respondent debriefing interviews over one round of data collection. This number of interviews is targeted because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover targeted businesses, and it should be large enough to provide reactions to the questions in order to identify meaningful findings.

The sampling universe for the BTOS WFH respondent debriefing testing sample consists of single and multi-unit firms who completed the Business Trends and Outlook Survey in Cycle 2 which includes the Work From Home supplemental content. We will focus on those who completed the WFH supplement.

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited using a sample file from the Business Trends and

Outlook Survey. First, we will send an email to the contact. This email will include instructions for respondents to schedule an interview time and date. We will verify the appointment time, and respond by email to the respondent with confirmation of scheduling; in that email, we will also verify the best number to reach the respondent. About 30 minutes before their appointment time, we will email the respondent again reminding of the upcoming appointment and including a link to the survey questions. The first screen of the online survey will be a Paperwork Reduction Action (PRA) and Privacy Act (PA) statement, informing participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential under Title 13 and asking for consent to be interviewed. Respondents will need to click a checkbox indicating that they understand these rights and agree to be interviewed (Attachment C). If email recruitment is not meeting our recruitment goals, we will move to telephone calls.

Protocols: A copy of a draft interview protocol for the moderated interviews is enclosed (Attachment B).

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: BTOS, including the Work from Home Supplement, questions

Attachment B: Draft protocol outlining intended questions to guide the moderated debriefings for the BTOS Work from Home Supplement

Attachment C: Consent form example, including PRA/PA statements

Burden Estimate: For moderated respondent debriefing interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 30 minutes (20 cases x 30 minutes per case = 10 hours).

Additionally, to recruit respondents testing, we expect to make up to 3 email contacts per completed case. The recruiting emails are expected to take on average 3 minutes to read [(3 attempted emails per completed case x 20 cases x 3 minutes per case) / 60 minutes] = 3 hours).

Thus, the estimated burden for the moderated respondent debriefing interviews is 13 hours.

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

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