

**Generic Information Collection Request:
Community Based Interview Study for the Annual Business Study 2025**

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, including business owner demographics. These questions are answered by business owners themselves or proxy reporters from the business. Many respondents for the ABS are not the owners themselves, and are reporting demographic information for owners, who they may not know well. In the ABS 24 pretesting, 53% or 109 participants were proxy reporting demographic information. We assume there are actually more proxy respondents, as owners may be more likely to participate in respondent research, but we do not have that data available.

This research focuses on two topics: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) measures and disability measures. Questions about these topics were cognitively tested in the summer of 2023 to mixed and unclear results. Most importantly, we were not able to meet with any participants who disclosed they or their bosses identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community,

and met with only a few disabled participants. As such, we felt it necessary to get feedback on how the social dynamics of a workplace might impact reporting on these measures, and speak to business owners from these populations to determine the best ways to measure these populations.

The results from this research will be recorded and a report produced that outlines the findings and recommendations for improving measurement for these two populations. This report will be shared with OMB ahead of the proposed information collection request for the 2025 ABS. This report will include:

- Enumerating unique social processes that impact barriers to reporting as per interviewees
- Identifying how workplace dynamics influence reporting specific demographics
- Identifying difficulties posed by proxy reporting
- Recommended changes to questions and response options to be implemented in the 2025 ABS

Population of Interest: LGBTQIA+ identified business owners and disabled business owners. Businesses should be representative of all business sizes and cover a variety of industries. We will purposively sample based on factors like age, race, and geographic location (including urban and rural residence).

Timeline: Testing will be conducted from March through June 2024.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: We will conduct two simultaneous branches of interviewing – one with LGBTQIA+ business owners and one with disabled business owners.

We will conduct open ended individual or group interviews with up to 100 respondents (50 per each branch of data collection). While we will default to individual interviews, participants may be more comfortable in group interviews (especially those in the disability community with communication differences) so we would be able to offer this option. Interviews will focus on the social processes that undergird reporting. These interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, with some option of in-person interviewing if that is more appropriate for certain participants. 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 Surveys Division may observe if available. We will use the interview guides (see Attachment A) to assess respondents' opinions on measurement of these two topics.

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 A).

Sample: We plan to enroll a maximum of 100 respondents via both individual interviews and group interviews. We plan to conduct interviews with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of businesses. We will also engage in purposive sampling to ensure we have representation in the data for such demographics as age, sector, and race. Lastly, we will ensure

representation of multiple kinds of business owners within a group (such as bisexual business owners or business owners with mental health conditions). This number of interviews was selected because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover target populations, and should be large enough to provide reactions to the topic in order to identify meaningful findings.

Recruitment: Community engaged approaches are appropriate for this work because these are considered hard-to-reach populations. The first step in this approach is targeted recruitment. We will be developing recruitment materials to explain that we are looking to get more information about LGBTQIA+ or disabled owned businesses. These recruitment materials will be tailored to both populations separately. They will largely include fliers describing our goal to garner feedback on how to ask the right questions to measure their populations (see Attachment D).

For both branches of research, we will reach out to community organizations representing these populations (for example, the LGBT Chamber of Commerce for the SOGI branch of the study). We will work with the Partnership Program to identify community organizations who have an existing relationship with the Census Bureau. We may approach local government offices aimed at supporting constituents from these populations to better identify ways to recruit for the study. Because these populations are hard to reach, we may use social media channels for targeted recruitment if we do not meet our goals via community organizations or local governments.

Participants will also 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 C).

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

Interviews or group interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. Participants will be asked the questions on the guide. Probes will be asked concurrently. We anticipate individual interview sessions will take 60 minutes to complete, and group interviews will take 90 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: Consent Form

Attachment B: 2025 ABS Community Based Interview Study SOGI Protocol Draft

Attachment C: 2025 ABS Community Based Interview Study Disability Protocol Draft

Attachment D: Example Recruitment Materials (Emails and Flyers)

Length of interview: We expect that each individual interview will last no more than 90 minutes (100 cases x 90 minutes per case = 150 hours). This is the maximum, as we expect most

respondents to opt for interviews rather than group interviews. To recruit participants we expect to reach out via email up to 2 times per completed case. The recruiting emails are expected to take on average 2 minutes to read and act upon (2 email contacts per completed case x 100 cases x 2 minute per case = 6.7 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for the interview portion of this project is 156.7 hours (150 hours for interviews + 6.7 hours for recruiting).

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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