

# Development of Research Program for Collection Strategies in Establishment Surveys

Susanne Johnson, U.S. Census Bureau

2021 FedCASIC Workshops

April 14, 2021

# Collection Strategy Research Program

- Goals:
  - Implement cost effective data collection strategies to maximize response
  - Incorporate new technology effectively
  - Inform best practices for 2022 Economic Census and other economic surveys
- Methods:
  - Lessons learned from 2017 Economic Census and other economic surveys
  - Focus groups and cognitive testing of respondents
  - Results from randomized experiments
  - Pilots

# Research Findings Applied to 2017 Economic Census

- 100% web data collection (no paper forms)\*
- One specific due date to make it relevant
- Due date reminder and accelerated standard follow-up
- Targeting certified mail follow-up and telephone follow-up
- Contact strategy moves from least expensive method to most expensive; increased intensity

*\*For Island Areas, paper forms included in the initial mailing for Single Units. For all Single Units, if respondent was unable to report online, phone center collected key items via phone.*

# How can we further improve collection strategies for ongoing surveys & 2022 Economic Census?

- Customize communication using online Respondent Portal
- Expand use of email
- Use real-time data to more effectively monitor response and be more responsive to changing conditions
- Use paradata in adaptive design and stopping rules to target collection efforts
- Examine other changes to improve follow-up efforts

# FY21 Pilots & Randomized Experiments to Prepare for 2022 Economic Census

Pilots	Randomized Experiments
Paradata-based systems for response monitoring & adaptive design	Email Follow-up Sequence and Timing
Automated Messaging using Respondent Portal	Office of General Council Follow-up
Rolling Extension Dates using Respondent Portal	Certified vs Priority Class Follow-up
Opting into Email Preference	

# Paradata-based Systems for Response Monitoring & Adaptive Design

- Pilot Response Monitoring Dashboard with charts, graphical displays, and drill-down capabilities that allow us to more effectively manage data collection operations and respond to changing conditions
- Pilot Response Intelligence System for adaptive design to target Telephone Follow-up to focus efforts on cases with greatest impact on estimates
- Surveys: 1 public sector & 1 business survey seeking to reduce costs

# Automated Messaging using Respondent Portal

- After respondent accesses survey in Respondent Portal, email customized Welcome Packet with information on how data is used and information to assist with reporting
- On the Respondent's Dashboard, customize information to assist with reporting
- After respondent completes survey, send email to thank them for their participation, remind them they can print out their response, and provide other useful information (such as where they can find survey results)
- Surveys: 1 public sector & several business surveys with need for tailored content

# Rolling Extension Dates Pilot

- To allow respondents more time to complete survey while balancing our processing demands, pilot rolling time extension dates
  - Allow respondents to choose a time extension within the upcoming 2-3 weeks (instead of a fixed extension window)
  - Alleviate spikes in calls around the last date of a fixed time extension window and spikes in data processing
- Surveys: 1 public sector & several business surveys that have used multiple fixed extension windows in the past



# Opting Into Email Preference Pilot

- Explore impact of allowing respondents to choose email as their preferred contact method
  - Present respondent option to go paperless after accessing survey in Respondent Portal
  - For those that opt in, contact by email only for Due Date Reminder and 1st and 2nd Follow-up and revert to mail follow-up for final collection efforts
- Survey: business survey with new sample cases & experienced respondents

# Email Follow-up Sequence & Timing Experiment

- Test impact of varying the timing and sequence of email follow-ups
  - Prior strategy: Start follow-up by mail then alternate between email and mail contacts
  - Experimental Panels: a) mail and then email follow-up, b) email and then mail follow-up, c) mail and email follow-up concurrently
- Survey: business survey with sufficient sample to support multiple panels

# Office of General Counsel Follow-up Experiment

- Explore replacing Office of General Counsel (OGC) follow-up letter, which is strongly-worded and focuses on legal reporting requirements and possible penalties
  - Economic Census and COS/ASM Strategies: Send selected cases OGC Letter via First Class Mail as final mail follow-up
  - Challenge: Obtain sufficient response with an OGC Lite letter that emphasizes legal reporting requirements without referring to OGC
  - 2x2 Experimental Design: OGC vs OGC Lite letters and First Class vs. Priority Class Mailing (which cost about \$4 more per letter)
- Survey: only 1 annual survey uses the OGC letter

# Certified vs Priority Class Follow-up Experiment

- Investigate effect of Priority Class envelopes on response rates and Undeliverable As Addressed (UAA) rates
  - Prior strategy: Use Certified Mail in later follow-ups to communicate legitimacy of official survey request
  - Challenge: Postal workers have been requiring signatures for Certified Mailing, increasing UAA rates
  - Experimental Panel: Use Priority Class Mail to communicate legitimacy of official survey request without postal workers requesting a signature
- Survey: business survey with sufficient follow-up workload to support multiple panels

# Summary

- Iterative implementation of contact strategy research through the use of annual survey programs provides invaluable information to improve our methods
- Collection strategy research program has enabled data-driven decisions, leading to a comprehensive, integrated, cost-effective contact strategy to maximize response for the 2017 Economic Census and will optimize planning for the 2022 Economic Census

# Questions



[Susanne.L.Johnson@census.gov](mailto:Susanne.L.Johnson@census.gov)