



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Census Bureau

Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Generic Clearance for Conducting Research Into Company Alternative Reporting Options

The Department of Commerce will submit the following information collection request to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and clearance in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, on or after the date of publication of this notice. We invite the general public and other Federal agencies to comment on proposed, and continuing information collections, which helps us assess the impact of our information collection requirements and minimize the public's reporting burden. Public comments were previously requested via the Federal Register on August 1st, 2025 (90 FR, pp. 36129-36131) during a 60-day comment period. This notice allows for an additional 30 days for public comments.

Agency: U.S. Census Bureau, Commerce.

Title: Generic Clearance for Conducting Research Into Company Alternative Reporting Options

OMB Control Number: 0607-NEW

Form Number(s): None.

Type of Request: Regular submission, New Information Collection Request.

Number of Respondents: Phase 1: 125. Phase 2: 180. Phase 3: 500.

Average Hours Per Response: Phase 1: 1 hour 47 minutes. Phase 2: 1 hour 30 minutes. Phase 3: 3 hours 0 minutes.

Burden Hours: 1993.

Needs and Uses: Over recent years, the U.S. Census Bureau has faced the challenge of declining response rates across its business surveys. In response, the Census Bureau is actively

seeking innovative approaches to ensure the continued collection of critical economic statistics. Such collection approaches are intended to minimize burden on businesses for reporting to economic surveys and censuses, in alignment with the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). The U.S. Census Bureau intends to use data collected through alternative approaches in a manner that would maximize utility of the data collected, enhance timeliness of statistical products and improve data consistency, while reducing operational costs and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. As technology continues to advance, the U.S. Census Bureau is evolving its data collection methods to better serve both respondents and the agency.

The Census Bureau requests a new generic clearance to research alternative methods for companies to provide data for business survey(s) and to assess suitability and feasibility of reporting company survey data via alternative data sources, such as submitting non-standard files or automated reporting. In collaboration with the companies that will participate in this research, the Census Bureau hopes to develop and refine these alternative reporting methods, enhance data collection, and reduce reporting burden. These improvements aim to streamline data submission processes for companies, increase data accuracy, and enable the Census Bureau to produce more timely and relevant business statistics.

The U.S. Census Bureau is taking a phased approach to investigate and implement new alternatives for collecting business data. One such measure involves exploring new methods for gathering data directly from businesses, aiming to make it easier for respondents to provide essential information while maintaining the integrity and quality of economic data. Phase 1 focused on determining whether respondents would be willing and able to respond to surveys by submitting non-standard data files directly. During the initial phase of this project, the U.S. Census Bureau has conducted initial discussions with 100-125 companies. The first several companies had existing relationships with the U.S. Census Bureau and were willing to collaborate on this project. Additional companies were selected by survey areas for possible onboarding (e.g., nonrespondents, large complex companies, companies sampled for multiple

Census Bureau surveys). Of the 100-125 companies that had initial contact, between 50-70 provided test files for review, and approximately 15-30 companies provided sufficient data to be removed from the standard survey collection process for at least one survey and provided files that were used in lieu of traditional reporting.

The process for onboarding companies consisted of an initial call or email to set up meetings with the companies to briefly explain the goal of the program. During the meeting, if they expressed interest in pursuing this option, they were asked to send test files that they can easily produce (e.g., Balance Sheets, Income Statements, Trial Balances, roster of business locations) through a secure email system. Those files were reviewed by accountants and subject matter experts, sometimes leading to requests by the Census Bureau for the company to provide additional data items. Once the company provided enough data to satisfy Census requirements, they were approved to report through this method. The company was provided with a Reporting Plan, detailing the files they agree to send, when they will send them, provided points of contact within the company, the surveys for which these data qualify as a response for, and which surveys they still need to complete through traditional methods. Once approved, files were uploaded through a Centurion portal. U.S. Census Bureau team members monitored the Centurion portal and the Reporting Plans to ensure proper compliance and followed up with any companies that did not upload their files by the agreed-upon date. The data files were then provided to the appropriate survey branches within the U.S. Census Bureau, and the data were entered into the individual survey databases. Each year the Reporting Plan will be reviewed, and the company will be contacted if files for subsequent survey years are not received.

In Phase 2, starting in late 2026, the Census Bureau plans to conduct follow-up research to assess the quality of the submitted data, the reporting burden on companies, the ease of file creation, gauge interest in other alternatives such as submitting non-standard data files directly or other types of direct data submission, and the resources required on the part of the U.S. Census Bureau to process these data. This phase of research will focus on understanding the experiences

of respondents in Phase 1, evaluating data availability, expansion to other surveys listed below, and exploring potential roadblocks to participation and understanding how to communicate these alternative options effectively to businesses. Concurrently, Census will use the provided data files to develop systems that: automate the extraction of data from the files, format the data to meet our needs, store the data in databases, and distribute the data to individual surveys.

Phase 3, expected to start in 2027, will apply these research findings by offering additional companies the opportunity to utilize alternative data reporting strategies. This phase aims to facilitate unstructured file uploads via invitation processes like in Phase 1 and/or secure reporting methods on our Centurion platform. If respondents who were contacted in Phase 1 and chose not to participate later express interest during Phases 2 or 3, they will be welcomed to participate. We will follow up with these companies and treat their onboarding and subsequent reporting activities in the same manner as other respondents in those phases.

Additionally, if based on findings in Phase 2 respondents are amenable, we plan to initiate the development of automated data pipelines, allowing companies to transmit information seamlessly from their systems. This will be rolled out along with research exploring additional submission methods to further streamline the process and enhance flexibility for respondents. This multi-step research initiative is expected to progress over the next several years, with ongoing evaluation and adaptation as new insights emerge.

Since the publication of the earlier notice, the scope of the collection effort has expanded beyond solely collecting data through direct transmission. The Census Bureau is exploring multiple alternative collection options, conducting research with respondents to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of these methods, and examining how each approach impacts respondent burden. As new technologies and practices emerge, the Bureau continues to identify and evaluate additional methods, ensuring the process evolves to meet both agency and respondent needs. This expansion via iterative research allows for greater flexibility and innovation in data collection strategies.

The Census Bureau plans to share our insights regarding how we are implementing and using alternative options for company data collection with other federal statistical agencies, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. By communicating our progress and research outcomes, we aim to provide valuable insights and foster greater understanding across agencies. Importantly, only information about our collection strategy, implementation, and lessons learned will be shared—actual respondent data or individual submissions will not be disclosed to other agencies.

Our goal is to encourage ongoing dialogue and eventual collaboration on developing alternative response strategies that can benefit businesses and streamline data collection efforts throughout the federal statistical system. At the very least, the Census Bureau plans to share findings across agencies to assist in building similar processes.

The collection of information is necessary to fulfill the statutory requirements and administrative objectives of the Census Bureau's economic survey programs, including the Annual Integrated Economic Survey (AIES), Economic Census, and related surveys. These collections are authorized under Title 13 United States Code, Sections 6, 131, 182, and 193, which mandate the collection and dissemination of economic statistics for the United States. The Census Bureau incorporates these legal authorities in the most recent OMB clearance requests for each survey utilizing company alternative data reporting.

The PRA focuses on maximizing data benefit and utility of collected data. Offering options for businesses to report data via alternative methods may mean that respondents may submit extra data through these non-traditional reporting methods. To ensure compliance with the PRA, the Census Bureau will not explicitly request data items that are not required by the specific survey collections outlined in the relevant statutes and regulations. If respondents choose to provide additional data through these alternative collection methods because it is easier or more efficient for them, the Census Bureau will accept such submissions but only retain information required by authorized survey requirements. If additional data are provided, the

Census Bureau will develop protocols filter and retain only the necessary information for statistical purposes.

This approach allows the Census Bureau to minimize reporting burden, maximize the utility of collected data, and maintain strict adherence to legal and administrative mandates governing the collection of economic information.

This clearance will be maintained separately as we continuously and iteratively research alternative ways of collecting data and modernizing data collection and will operate as a generic clearance. Future phases of research will be submitted to OMB for review under this generic clearance.

Frequency: It is expected that participating companies will provide data as often as monthly and at least once annually. The frequency may be modified to accommodate program requirements and company preferences. This ongoing burden is considered negligible, but it will be documented and tracked as part of future clearance requests.

Respondent's Obligation: Participation in this program is voluntary.

Legal Authority: Title 13 U.S.C. Sections 6, 131, 161, 182 and 193.

This information collection request may be viewed at www.reginfo.gov. Follow the instructions to view the Department of Commerce collections currently under review by OMB.

Written comments and recommendations for the proposed information collection should be submitted within 30 days of the publication of this notice on the following website www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain. Find this particular information collection by selecting "Currently under 30-day Review - Open for Public Comments" or by using the search function and entering the title of the collection.

Sheleen Dumas,

*Departmental PRA Compliance Officer, Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs,
Commerce Department.*

[FR Doc. 2026-22117 Filed: 10/28/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 10/29/2026]