

**Household Pulse Survey  
During COVID-19 Epidemic**

Request for OMB approval

April 17, 2020

**Supporting Statement Section A**

## **1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary**

The U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau requests an emergency 90-day approval of an emergency Information Collection Request (ICR) to conduct the Household Pulse Survey during the COVID-19 epidemic in the United States.

The U. S. Census Bureau in consultation with its federal statistical partners endeavors to pilot a rapid response **Household Pulse Survey** in order to produce and disseminate data about the health, social, and economic characteristics of American households as they experience the COVID-19 epidemic. This is a short-term, urgent endeavor designed to maximize the federal statistical system in addressing these emergent data needs. Given the rapidly changing dynamics of this situation for American households, there is an acute need for data that shed light on the situation as it is unfolding. Therefore, we cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance process.

The proposed questions are shown in Attachment A. Statement to respondents related to Privacy Act and Paper Reduction Act is included in Attachment B. Contact language for respondents, which includes invitations to participate via email and SMS text, is in Attachment C.

## **2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection**

The Census Bureau has developed the Household Pulse survey platform as an experimental endeavor in cooperation with five other federal agencies. Testing this platform during the COVID-19 epidemic will allow the federal statistical systems to demonstrate proof of concept with respect to the household pulse survey platform by providing states with weekly data about the health, social, and economic characteristics of the population. Changes in these measures over time and geography will provide insight into the scope of the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic in the US. The ability to understand how individuals are experiencing business curtailment and closures, stay-at-home orders, school closures, changes in the availability of consumer goods and consumer patterns, and other abrupt and significant changes to American life. This experimental survey is designed to supplement the ability of the federal statistical system to rapidly respond and provide salient information based on a high quality sample frame, data integration, and cooperative expertise.

Question domains contributed by the Census Bureau (Census), Economic Research Service (ERS), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and the Department of Housing (HUD) seek to measure employment status, consumer spending, food security, housing, education disruptions, and dimensions of physical and mental wellness. Many of the questions that will be asked on this survey have been fielded on other surveys in the past. However some are new, designed to explore potential impacts associated with the COVID-19 epidemic response.

This collection will be fielded in stages in order to allow data collection as we are still refining the questions and the weighting algorithms. The first week of data collection is designed to stress test the system and collect information about response to enable the development of the

programs necessary to provide estimates that are representative at the national and state level. Between week one and week two of data collection, the programs to generate the weights will be generated. Simultaneous with the first week of data collection, Census and the sponsoring agencies (Census, ERS, BLS, NCHS, NCES, and HUD) will cognitively test the new questions, with a focus on improving the comprehension and clarity, particularly in reference to aspects of the epidemic response. Additional questions not fielded during week one may also be tested (e.g., questions designed to understand consumer spending associated with stimulus payments). The goal is to have refined questions ready to field by week 2. It is also possible that the wording of some questions may be tweaked between weeks 2 and 3 and that new questions within the already approved question domains may be added.

Census will submit all changes to the questionnaire approved for week 1 to OMB as a non-substantive change request (memo identifying changes and basis for those changes) *before* fielding those updates.

Because this is an experimental launch of the Household Pulse platform and approach, all results will be disseminated from the Census Experimental Statistical Products series (<https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html>; see also Attachment D). Additional supporting documentation on the Census Bureau's approach in conducting this rapid response data collection, including consideration related to dissemination and data quality are found in Attachment E.

### **3. Use of Improved Information Technology and Burden Reduction**

The Census Bureau will conduct this information collection online using Qualtrics as the data collection platform. Qualtrics is currently used at the Census Bureau for research and development surveys and provides the necessary agility to deploy the Household Pulse Survey quickly and securely. It operates in the Gov Cloud, is FedRAMP authorized at the moderate level, and has an Authority to Operate from the Census Bureau to collect personally identifiable and Title-protected data. The Census Bureau will utilize longitudinal data collection methodology to limit the need to re-ask questionnaire content once baseline information has been collected for continuing cases.

### **4. Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information**

The Census Bureau and its sponsoring survey partners have initiated efforts to incorporate epidemic response-related questions into the existing benchmark surveys, but those efforts are longer term. There are multiple polls and surveys underway covering various dimensions of the Covid-19 epidemic.

- Kaiser Family Foundation
- CNBC/Change Research
- Huffington Post
- CNN/SRSS
- Morning Consult/Politico

- Harris Poll
- University of Southern California, Understanding America Study
- NORC Covid Impact Study

The Household Pulse Survey proposed here does not duplicate these efforts: first, the sample of the Household Pulse Survey will be very large relative to these other efforts, sufficient in size to produce estimates at the state level as well as for 15 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Secondly, the sample frame is the Master Address File (MAF), which is the gold standard frame for U.S. statistics and provides sampled respondents all of the strict confidentiality protections afforded them under Title 13 U.S.C. The statistical infrastructure at the Census Bureau, and within the federal statistical system, enables the use of the MAF coupled with auxiliary and administrative data to allow for extensive procedures to ensure the ability to understand and improve the representativeness of the survey results. Thirdly, the questionnaire has been designed with input from six federal agencies, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the USDA Economic Research Service, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Census Bureau. As such, it is a comprehensive, omnibus instrument that will efficiently produce data that informs on multiple sectors impacted by the Covid-19 epidemic and associated response. It is sustainable under the Census Bureau's authority to conduct demonstration projects. Lastly, the data will carry the imprimatur of the federal statistical system and its standards for data stewardship, objectivity and transparency.

## **5. Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities**

The collection of this information does not involve small businesses or other small entities.

We designed the survey questions to obtain the required information with minimal respondent burden. Further, there are no legal issues that influence respondent burden.

## **6. Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently**

We will conduct this survey over a twelve-week period. Each household in sample will be interviewed three times. Limited longitudinal data collection and the rotation design will provide sufficient measurement of change while limiting the burden on any one household.

## **7. Special Circumstances Relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5**

Collection of these data is conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

## **8. Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice and Efforts to Consult Outside the Agency**

A. Because this is a request for an emergency clearance, the Census Bureau asks that the 60-day comment period be waived. The Census Bureau will publish a public notice about this information collection in the Federal Register within 30 days of approval. If this collection extends past a 90-day

period, a 60-day Federal Register Notice (FRN) will be published to allow the public to comment.

B. The efforts to consult outside the agency are outlined below:

The content and design of the Household Pulse Survey has been developed to serve the needs of the five agencies below and the Census Bureau in addition to providing a resource for the public benefit. Representatives of these agencies have been involved in the development of the content of the survey and will be critical in the dissemination of the findings. The following list contains analysts, researchers, economists, and organizational leaders who have collaborated with the Census Bureau and contributed content to the Household Pulse Survey:

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## **9. Explanation of Any Payment or Gift to Respondents**

There are no payments or gifts provided to respondents.

## **10. Protection of the Privacy and Confidentiality of Information Provided by Respondents**

The information to be collected is protected under the confidentiality provisions of Title 13 U.S.C. Respondents are informed of the nature and extent of the confidentiality of the information they report in the emails they receive and in the information collection instruments.

## **11. Justification for Sensitive Questions**

The Census Bureau does not deem any content to be of a sensitive nature.

## **12. Estimates of Annualized Burden Hours and Costs**

The Census Bureau estimates that, for the average household, this survey will take about 20 minutes to complete, including the time for reviewing the instructions and answers. Since the total number of respondents per week is expected to be 108,000 and we expect to collect information for 12 weeks, the total annual burden is (1,296,000 x 0.33 hours) or 427,680 hours. In its efforts to ensure questionnaire items are sound, the Census Bureau estimates an additional 100 burden hours for cognitive testing. The 100 hours include testing in the early weeks (Weeks 1 and 2) of deployment as well as ongoing testing to support continuous improvements as needed.

## **13. Estimate of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents or Record Keepers**

We do not expect respondents to incur any costs other than that of their time to respond.

## **14. Cost to the Federal Government for 90 Days**

The government cost to conduct the Household Pulse Survey is approximately \$1,232,825 all paid from Census Bureau appropriations.

## **15. Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments**

This is a new request. There are no changes or adjustments to an existing program.

#### **16. Plans for Tabulation and Publication and Project Time Schedule**

The Census Bureau plans to release data on a weekly basis. Data and analysis products will be released in collaboration with the participating agencies. Tabular data and access to disclosure protected data through the Census API are expected.

#### **17. Reason(s) Not to Display OMB Expiration Date**

The OMB expiration date will be displayed within the data collection instrument.

#### **18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions**

There are no exceptions to the certification.

Attachment A: Household Pulse Survey Questionnaire

Attachment B: Privacy Act/Paper Reduction Act Statement

Attachment C: Respondent Contact Language

Attachment D: Census Bureau Experimental Statistical Product Series: Guiding Principles

Attachment E: Additional Supporting Documentation on the Household Pulse Survey