

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

19-21 SEPTEMBER 2018 – STATISTICS PORTUGAL, LISBON

HARMONIZING ECONOMIC SURVEYS

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Abstract

In response to declining budgets and decreasing response rates, the US Census Bureau launched an effort to harmonize all economic survey programs. Primary goals included the following: produce timely, relevant products/services; reduce respondent burden; improve quality; increase ability to share data and resources across surveys; increase the agility and efficiency of economic programs; and maintain a high level of trust with data users and respondents. From these goals, requirements for capabilities were identified and projects were launched. This presentation will primarily discuss projects to harmonize survey content and the business units while acknowledging other efforts that are currently ongoing.

The business unit harmonization team's goal is to determine a common unit of observation that all economic survey programs could implement consistently in data collection. They first developed a complexity indicator to understand the business population. This segmented the population into complexity categories gauging organizational structure and industry diversity. Initial research focused on the most complex companies and concluded a standardized unit was not possible. Rather these companies require a dedicated account manager to develop customized reporting units. Additional research was conducted on all remaining companies to determine feasibility of a harmonized observational unit. Research recommended a unit based on the industries each company operates in.

The content harmonization team is seeking to develop common concepts, terms, and survey questions across all economic surveys. The team started by investigating and harmonizing inventory questions, assessing the quality of inventory data, and field testing the questions. Similar work has started on questions requesting data on payroll, sales, and

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expenses. In addition, a content change control process was established and administered among all surveys.

We would like to discuss challenges, successes and opportunities others have experienced during harmonization efforts. How are business units defined for data collection purposes in your organizations? Are they consistently defined across survey programs? Why or why not? What benefits do you see in harmonizing survey content and collection units?

