

**21th Meeting of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers
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Country progress report 2008

1. Organization and population of the BR

The Canadian Business Register (BR) is a central repository containing all significantly active businesses in Canada, together with their contact and classification information. Approximately 2.6 million active businesses are represented on the BR, of which 20,000 have more than one production unit. Economic entities on the BR are classified by institutional type, geographic location, industry (North American Industry Classification) and size in terms of employment and gross business income.

The BR plays a vital role in Statistics Canada's economic statistics program. More than one hundred business surveys use it to support their activities, including the establishment of a survey frame, sampling, collecting and processing of data, and the production of estimates. The number of employees in the Business Register Division—the group responsible for the maintenance and operation of the BR—is in the range of 95 to 105.

2. Progress and developments during the past year

- **Business Register Redesign Project**

As stated in the last two years' progress reports, a complete redesign of the BR has been undertaken. The new Business Register System went into production on January 7, 2008. Throughout the three years of this project, work progressed as planned on all levels. We revised the conceptual framework, defined new operational processes and developed the technological architecture. Components of the new Register have been built, tested and implemented on an iterative basis with each iteration delivering additional functionality to the user. This has allowed regular intervention and ensured that the product meets the requirements of the project.

Given the significant differences in both procedures and technological tools from the old Register, a completely new training program was developed in order to adequately prepare clients and support users. A well defined certification process was put in place so that users are appropriately trained for the work they need to accomplish on the Business Register System (BRS) and to ensure that users understand the data before they are allowed access.

In order to facilitate the move to the new BR, a comprehensive transition plan was developed and implemented. This was particularly important considering the complexity of this project and the tight schedule which many of the surveys must follow. It was a highly successful, co-operative effort between BRD and project stakeholders.

Simplification has been a theme throughout the project from the system's environment to streamlining its processes. The goal has been to make it easier for users to retrieve the information that they need when they need it. Not only does this result in significant efficiencies for both BRD and our partners, but reduces the learning curve and increases accessibility. An integrated BR provides improved links with administrative and survey data allowing Statistic Canada to better monitor and manage respondent burden. Building in flexibility so that all business surveys can be hooked up the BR further increases the coherence and quality of business statistics which benefits the department as a whole.

- **Hooking up new surveys**

BRD has successfully reconciled and hooked up a number of surveys including surveys from the Balance of Payments Division, the Centre for Education Statistics Division, the Services Division and the Environment Accounts and Statistics Division. In addition, we have completed profiling and reconciliation for municipalities for the Public Institution Division. Finally, we are in the process of reconciling the 23 energy surveys from Manufacturing and Energy Division and the outlets used in the prices index survey from Prices Division. The Redesign has facilitated this process by increasing the register's ability to accommodate these surveys.

3. Future plans

- **Integration of the collection and BR systems**

The environment developed around data collection activities needs to be rethought in the following areas. We need to improve the quality of survey feedback received from the collection staff. Currently a large number of the changes received from collection areas are not applied to the Register. The most frequent reasons for rejecting the request are that the update was already made on the BR or that the requested change is not valid. Together with collection areas, we need to explore ways to reduce the number of rejected update requests. Real time access to the BR should be provided to the collection staff so they can obtain our most current picture of the business and so avoid sending obsolete updates. Training needs to be improved so collection staff is better equipped to send appropriate change requests.

We also need to review the processes currently in place that provide sampling units to the collection areas as well as receive information on collection outcomes. The BR is responsible for maintaining each collection entity. It provides contact information, maintains the terms and conditions for data collection and produces accurate lists of resource persons who can be contacted to supply the data that is requested when surveys are conducted. All this information is passed by file to the collection areas at the time of collection. This same information is then stored in the collection systems. As data collection progresses, files are then passed back to the BR to update the appropriate fields and are used to manage response burden. As described above, there is no integration between the BRS and the collection system. We believe that by integrating the information that is used in both environments, we will ensure common access to the most recent data available for every business and remove the risk introduced by passing all the data between the two environments.

- **Development of the Integrated Data Base**

The BR will work very closely with the Business and Trade Statistics field in creation of an integrated database (IBD). The objective of this new component, as described by managers within this field, is to better understand the behaviour and strategy of firms. It should support a wide range of policy queries and enable the monitoring, over time, of the impacts from policy intervention. In this new component of the statistical system, there will be an increasing need to complement quantitative information derived from survey and tax data with qualitative information. This new component will also enhance the existing statistical system to better understand specific behaviors of Canadian businesses.

Preliminary discussions suggest that the business universe for these initiatives must be defined by the BR in order that this component remains in sync with other Statistics Canada programs. This implies the introduction of new update practices for the BR to support new informational needs. Although processes were developed so that survey activities are supported by the most up-to-date information on the Register, none of the tools, procedures or resources are in place to qualify the nature of these updates. For example, if a unit ceases operations, we do not expend effort to determine if this closure is a result of a re-organization or just simply the end of its operations. We do not currently have access to data on 'real' births and deaths, or whether updates were as a result of re-structuring within an enterprise or enterprise group. The ability to produce such detailed information will only come about after much review and discussion with our partners.