

Appendix C: Supplier Survey Methodology

The research team first conducted interviews at firms predominantly in the second and third tiers of the auto supply chain, during July and August of 2010. Because the goal of the interviews was to inform the survey design, we did not aim for a representative sample. Instead, we aimed for a convenience sample with a focus on firms in Northeast Ohio, plus a few examples of southern firms for comparison to the tri-state region. Our interviews were largely with sales managers and company presidents, and except in one case, included an extensive plant tour. To the extent that there is a bias (beyond geography), we believe most (though not all) of the firms we interviewed were above average.

The study's second phase was a nationwide survey of automotive suppliers. This phase involved designing three surveys, building our database of eligible firms and finding survey participants at those firms.

The three surveys we designed for each firm were a human resources survey, a sales survey and a plant management survey. Initial survey design was based on important topics that came up in pre-survey interviews. We requested multiple rounds of feedback from economists at a number of universities and altered the surveys accordingly over time. We then conducted 11 trial runs of these surveys at Northeast Ohio firms to solicit further feedback and altered the survey accordingly. Finally, we wrote an abridged version of the surveys after two months of soliciting responses in order to allow participation from firms with greater time constraints.

We obtained our initial databases of automotive suppliers from a number of sources, including ELM

International, Analyst Resource Center (ARC), and trade associations such as the Precision Metalforming Association and the Industrial Fasteners Institute. We then used NAICS codes to generate lists of firms that are automotive suppliers. We organized the resulting data such that each plant location and division headquarters within the United States was an individual observation on our list, taking the necessary steps to eliminate duplicates. The resulting database included one address and phone number for each observation.

Finally, we worked with a survey research firm in Michigan to contact eligible survey participants. We first sent out postcards and emails to inform firms they would be eligible to participate in our survey. The survey research firm then called each observation on our list of firms to obtain the name and email address of a sales representative. Survey researchers then generated unique URLs for each of the three surveys for a given firm and emailed those links to the sales representatives. Sales representatives were asked to complete the sales survey and forward the HR and plant management surveys on to the appropriate individuals at that firm or plant. Later, we mailed hard copies of abridged surveys to firms that had not yet completed the web surveys.

Finally, the third phase of the study consisted of 30 post-survey interviews. The main differences between these interviews and those conducted before the survey were that for the second round of interviews we visited some firms in different Southeastern states, and in some instances we placed extra focus on the issues of outsourcing and re-shoring production. 