



DATA DEVELOPMENTS

* THE COMMONWEALTH'S OFFICIAL SOURCE OF POPULATION AND ECONOMIC STATISTICS *

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The American Community Survey: An Update

This is one of a monthly series of briefs to keep you updated on activities surrounding the Decennial and Economic Censuses and other surveys that provide you with valuable data. These have been published previously under the titles of "A 2000 Census Update," "Economic Census Update," and "American Community Survey Update."

Introduction

After the 1990 Decennial Census, the U.S. Census Bureau was charged to find a means of reducing the undercount and reducing the costs of the Census. That mandate, along with the constant demand for more current data between Decennials, led to the creation of a new method of continuous measurement. The result is the American Community Survey (ACS).

The ACS is a method of collecting data at local levels between Decennial Censuses. Currently, the Decennial Census is the only data and uniform measure from the national level to the block level. Unfortunately, the data becomes outdated after a few years but must still be used since they are the most comprehensive data available.

The ACS is still in the test and implementation phase. The goal is to have the ACS replace the long form used in the Decennial Census. Then every ten years, only the short form would need to be completed by U.S. residents during the Decennial. The rich socio-economic data that results from the long form would be refreshed each year by the ACS.

Why It is Important

As with the Decennial Census, data are used as a part of funding formulas for billions of federal and state government monies to local communities. The data will help communities make decisions about where to locate infrastructure, encourage economic development, and measure the performance of programs. It will be used in the formulation, administration and evaluation of public policy.

The ACS will be used in the same ways that Decennial Census data has been used. The difference is that the data will always be current, an invaluable characteristics in the decision making process.

How is it Conducted?

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Each month a systematic sample of addresses from the most current MAF is selected. The sample does not contain addresses contacted in the previous five years. Therefore, residents only answer the ACS at the most once every five years. The sample size is designed to approximate the sampling ratio of the 2000 Decennial with over sampling in smaller governmental areas.

The ACS uses the Master Address File for mailing or delivering monthly questionnaires to potential respondents. Six weeks after the mailing, commercial phone listings are used for non-response follow-up, conducting the interview on the telephone in lieu of a completed form. Follow-up is finished by doing personal visits to a subsample of those who still have not responded.

Address Updating is an ongoing operation using the Master Address File and updating it through visits of Census Field staff to the community governments to identify new addresses or make corrections. Local lists are utilized wherever possible. Postal Service lists are also integrated.

Four ACS test sites were introduced in 1996: Bravard County, FL; Multnomah County, OR; Rockland County, NY; and Fulton County, PA. Additional counties were added each year. Schuylkill County, PA, was added in 1999.

A comparison of data with the 2000 Decennial Census will be conducted and results analyzed. In the spring of 2000, 1,203 counties were added nationwide for a total of 1,234. In Pennsylvania, the following 37 counties were added to the two already included (Fulton and Schuylkill):

Allegheny	Dauphin	Mercer
Beaver	Delaware	Mifflin
Berks	Erie	Monroe
Bucks	Fayette	Montgomery
Butler	Huntingdon	Northampton
Cambria	Lackawanna	Perry
Cameron	Lancaster	Philadelphia
Carbon	Lawrence	Potter
Chester	Lebanon	Somerset
Clearfield	Lehigh	Washington
Columbia	Luzerne	Westmoreland
Cumberland	McKean	Wyoming
		York

Full implementation in every county of the nation is expected by 2003 if funding is provided. The sample size will be 3 million households annually.

The Data

The ACS uses the annual average population throughout the year. For small-area estimates, the average is for a multi-year period. Areas with populations of 65,000 or more will use annual averages when the Survey is fully implemented. Areas with populations of 20,000 to 64,999 will use three-year averages; those with populations of less than 20,000 will use five-year averages.

If in full operation, data will be available every year for areas and population groups of

65,000 or more beginning in 2004. For areas of population of 20,000 or less, it will take five years to accumulate a large enough sample to provide estimates with accuracy similar to the decennial census. That means that updated information for areas such as neighborhoods will be available starting in 2008 and then every year thereafter. Everything is contingent, however, on continuous funding.

Address updating is also an important part of ACS. The ACS Coverage Program will complement TIGER updating. Once this address updating is fully functional, it will facilitate updating addresses for the 2010 Decennial.

Current residence rules apply to the ACS. People who are staying for two or more months at a temporary location are included at that location.

Types of data that will be collected and tabulated include: age, gender, race/ethnicity, family structure, income, poverty, education, work, unemployment, commuting patterns, and housing characteristics.

All individual data is confidential and protected by Title 13. Participation in the ACS, like the Decennial, is mandatory.

Some Differences Between ACS and the Decennial Census

Reference Date

The Decennial uses April 1st as the reference date of the Decennial Census year (i.e., April 1, 2000). The ACS uses annual averages or multi-year averages. The reference date is a year.

Reference Period

The Decennial Census asks specific questions pertaining to the previous calendar year. For instance, the 2000 Decennial Census question asked for income for calendar year 1999. The ACS collects data for the previous 12 months, not specifically for a calendar year.

Residence Rule

The Decennial Census asks for “usual residence,” as defined on census day. The ACS uses “current residence.” This means individuals are counted at the residence where they receive the form if they reside there at least two months.

Additional Information

Copies of *Data Developments*; *Census 2000*, *Economic Census* or *American Community Survey Updates*; or other Census information may be obtained by contacting:

The Pennsylvania State Data Center
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Harrisburg, PA 17120

Voice: (717) 772-2710
Email: PaSDC-Census@psu.edu
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(click on Census)