

Questions and Answers

American Community Survey

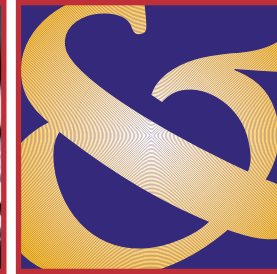


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U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Helping You Make Informed Decisions

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

United States
**Census
2010**



What is the American Community Survey?

It is a new survey the U.S. Census Bureau developed as part of the decennial census program.

- The American Community Survey (ACS) will provide critical economic, social, demographic, and housing information to this country's communities every year, instead of once in 10 years. Communities tell us the American Community Survey helps them make informed decisions and is a key to their future.
- The Census Bureau plans to conduct the American Community Survey in every county, American Indian and Alaska Native Area, Hawaiian Home Land, and in Puerto Rico, once it is fully implemented, pending Congressional funding. It will replace the long form in the 2010 census and greatly simplify operations, so that the focus of the 2010 census is solely on counting the population.

In response to the need policymakers and community leaders say they have for accurate, timely, and comparable information, the Census Bureau successfully reengineered a portion of the decennial census by developing the American Community Survey to provide updated social, economic, and housing information for local areas every year instead of once in 10 years. In addition, this reengineering means a better census in 2010.

I have not heard of the American Community Survey. How long have you been conducting it? How can I see the results of the survey?

The American Community Survey has been tested in a sample of counties across the country since 1996. The information collected from these tests is published on the Census Bureau's Web site at www.census.gov/acs/www and American FactFinder® at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.



The data are provided in several formats for everyone from beginners (who may just want to look at the data) to experienced researchers. The American Community Survey Web site provides easy to read “Narrative Profiles” with text, charts, and graphs, as well as “Tabular Profiles” that show the data in tables.

American FactFinder® provides “Quick Tables” that provide an overview of the data quickly, “Geographic Comparison Tables” that compare data for different places, and “Detailed Tables” that provide more extensive data for more detailed research.

I feel that the American Community Survey is intrusive. Why do you have to ask such personal questions?

Every question on the American Community Survey is required to manage or evaluate government programs or to conduct the

survey. The questions on the American Community Survey questionnaire are essentially the same as those that have been asked as part of the decennial census. It is simply a change to collecting and updating the data annually, instead of once in 10 years at the time of the decennial census. For example, through the American Community Survey:

- **Income** information makes it possible to compare the economic levels of different areas. Many federal and state programs use such data to distribute funds for community development.
- **Military service** information is used primarily by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to measure the needs of veterans and to evaluate veterans' programs dealing with education, employment, and health care.
- Responses to questions about **income and housing** are summarized into profiles that the



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development uses to assess the need for housing assistance for elderly, handicapped, and low-income homeowners.

- Information about **age, race, Hispanic origin, and language** spoken at home is used to determine bilingual election requirements under the Voting Rights Act.

Are the data confidential? Can the police, the local government, or other regulatory agencies see my answers to the survey?

Your data are confidential under Title 13, United States Code, Sections 9 and 214.

- Title 13 specifies that the Census Bureau can use the information provided by individuals for statistical purposes only and cannot publish or release information that would identify any individual. Instead,

data are released as profiles of groups of individuals within broad geographic areas.

- The police cannot see it; the Immigration and Naturalization Service cannot see it; no other government agency can see it; and no court of law can see it. No one can see or use individual information for regulation.
- Congress has imposed severe criminal sanctions of up to 5 years' imprisonment and/or up to a \$250,000 fine, for any Census Bureau employee who violates those provisions (13 U.S.C., Section 214, as amended by Title 18 U.S.C., Sections 3559 and 3571).



Do I have to answer the questions on the American Community Survey?

Congress's decision that citizen participation in the decennial census is so important that there is a mandatory duty to respond also applies to the American Community Survey. This is analogous to the mandatory responsibility of all citizens to serve on a jury if called to participate. The duty to respond is set forth in several sections of federal law, specifically Title 13, sections 141 and 193. This decision means that the administration of federal programs is based on more than guessing about the needs and resources of a community. At the same time, the respondent's confidentiality is strictly protected by law, as discussed above.

I am elderly, disabled, or otherwise unable to complete the American Community Survey questionnaire.

What do I do?

If a respondent is unable to complete the questionnaire, the respondent may designate another person to help complete the questionnaire. Or, a Census Bureau representative may call the respondent, or a field representative may come to your house and assist you in completing the form. Respondents may also call 1-800-354-7271 for assistance in completing the survey.

An individual address has a chance of selection only once in a 5-year period. Most households do not receive the survey. We include only a small percentage of addresses in the survey each year. That is why it is so important that each household that is part of the survey responds.



How do I benefit by answering the American Community Survey?

Federal agencies, states, and communities say they do not have the up-to-date information they need to better understand community issues, respond to needs, and allocate programs and resources. A community leader said, "Guessing is always fun, but seldom effective."

By responding to the American Community Survey questionnaire, you are helping your community establish community goals, identify community problems and solutions, locate facilities and programs, and measure the performance of programs.

The American Community Survey data are used by:

- *Local governments* for budgeting, evaluating programs, and

planning for community development projects.

- *Community programs*, such as those for the elderly, scout programs, libraries, churches, banks, hospitals, and other community organizations, to provide services to the community and to locate buildings, services, and programs.
- *Transportation planners* (using summarized journey-to-work information) to plan for peak volumes of traffic in order to reduce traffic congestion, plan for parking, and develop strategies, such as carpooling programs and flexible work schedules. Decisions are made to build new roads or add capacity to existing roads; and to develop transit systems, such as light rail or subways by projecting ridership.



- *Utility companies* to understand their customer bases, so they can project future needs. Every time you turn on your water faucet or a light in your home, summarized census data are behind the services you receive.

Why do you ask questions about Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin and race?

The Census Bureau collects and publishes data on Hispanic origin and race based on guidelines that were revised by the Office of Management and Budget in October 1997.

The American Community Survey provides updates of the changing diversity of the American population at the local level and will provide more current demographic and economic profiles than have been available from the decennial census—

- For people of Hispanic origin: for example, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans.
- For major race groups: for example, White; Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander.
- For ancestry groups: for example, German, Italian, Irish, Arab, and French-Canadian.
- For the foreign-born population.

Do I have to answer these questions every year?

No. An individual address has a chance of selection only once in a 5-year period. People who move may get the survey more than once in 5 years, but an individual address will not be in the sample again for at least 5 years. Most households do not receive the survey. We include only a small percentage of addresses in the survey each year.



I am only staying at this address temporarily. Do I still have to complete the questionnaire?

If you are staying for 2 or more months at your temporary address, please fill out the information for everyone living there **and** answer the housing questions on pages 4, 5, and 6 about the temporary residence (not your regular residence). If you are at the temporary residence for less than 2 months, complete **only** pages 4, 5, and 6 about the temporary residence and return the form. This information helps communities plan as the population changes at different times of the year.

How do I contact someone from the American Community Survey directly if I have questions or concerns?

There are two easy methods. If you have Internet access, simply send an e-mail to <cmo.acs@census.gov>. You may also contact American Community Survey staff toll-free at 1-888-346-9682.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



E-mail: cmo.acs@census.gov



Phone: 1-888-346-9682



Internet:
www.census.gov/acs/www

American Community Survey FREQUENTLY ASKED MEDIA QUESTIONS

PURPOSE:

Q: What is the American Community Survey?

A: Short answer:

The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides an updated portrait of America every year, replacing the Census Bureau's "long form" that produced data only once every 10 years. It's a key part of the Census Bureau's efforts to meet the American public's demand for more timely census data.

Longer answer:

The country needs fresh census data more than once every ten years. The census "long form" was like a snapshot of community characteristics taken once every ten years. But during the ten years between censuses that snapshot fades, and the data becomes outdated and irrelevant. The American Community Survey's new, innovative statistical methods allow the Census Bureau to produce data every year. The annual data is like a moving picture that gives shows trends and changes in community characteristics from one year to the next, giving community planners the tools they need to make informed decisions.

SCOPE:

Q: How many addresses get the survey?

A: Beginning in January 2005, the ACS

- has been mailed to about 1 in 480 addresses each month throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico
- will have been mailed to about 1 in 40 addresses per year (2.5% of the population)
- has been mailed to about 500-600 per month per congressional district
- has been mailed to more addresses in less populated areas
- has a sample size that includes about 3 million addresses each year, or 250,000 addresses per month

Q: How does the sample size compare to Census 2000?

A: Approximately 1-in-6 addresses received the "long form" in Census 2000, and about 1-in-8 addresses will receive the ACS over the next five years, which is the length of time it will take to accumulate statistically accurate data for even the smallest geographical areas.

Q: How often will I get the survey?

A: No address will receive the survey more than once every five years, and some might not get it for decades, if ever.

Q: How many addresses are included in the survey?

A: About 3 million addresses per year beginning in 2005, or 250,000 per month.

Q: How many counties are in the U.S.?

A: There are 3,141 counties and county equivalents in the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

They are categorized as follows:
 3,007 entities named "County"
 16 Boroughs in Alaska
 11 Census Areas in Alaska (for areas not organized into Boroughs by the State)
 64 Parishes in Louisiana
 42 Independent Cities (1 in Maryland, 1 in Missouri, 1 in Nevada, and the remainder in Virginia)
 1 District - the Federal District or District of Columbia.

Q: Do you have data for metropolitan statistical areas (MSA's)?

A: Yes – currently for most MSA's of 250,000 or more

Q: When will you begin surveying Puerto Rico?

A: The "Puerto Rico Community Survey" began in January 2005

Q: When will you begin surveying group quarters and institutions?

A: Group quarters data collection begins in 2006, with data included in the August '07 release.

Q: What are "group quarters and institutions?"

A: Group Quarters Population -- The group quarters population includes all people not living in households. Two general categories of people in group quarters are recognized: 1) the institutionalized population which includes people under formally authorized, supervised care or custody in institutions at the time of enumeration (such as correctional institutions, nursing homes, and juvenile institutions) and 2) the noninstitutionalized population which includes all people who live in group quarters other than institutions (such as college dormitories, military quarters, and group homes).
<http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/grpqtr/grpqtr01.xls>

Q: What is the timeline for getting results for smaller areas?

A: See chart:

Type of Data	Population Size of Area	Data For The Previous Year Released In The Summer Of:							
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010+
Annual estimates	250,000+	[Timeline bar from 2003 to 2010+]							
Annual estimates	65,000+	[Timeline bar from 2006 to 2010+]							
3-year averages	20,000+	[Timeline bar from 2008 to 2010+]							
5-year averages	Census Tract and Block Group*	[Timeline bar from 2010+ to 2010+]							

 Data reflect American Community Survey testing through 2004

* Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county averaging about 4,000 inhabitants. Census block groups generally contain between 600 and 3,000 people. The smallest geographic level for which data will be produced is the block group; the Census Bureau will not publish estimates for small numbers of people if there is a probability that an individual can be identified.

Q: What percentage of the population, will be covered cumulatively under the 65,000 and 20,000 thresholds?

A: In terms of counties, 82.5% of the US population live in counties of 65,000 or greater, 95.5% live in counties of 20,000 or greater

CONTENT:

Q: Number of questions?

A: There are more than 60 questions on the survey, and they are essentially the same as the questions that were on the Census 2000 long form

Q: What is the wording of the survey questions?

A: Go to the online media toolkit – accessible via the ACS web page (www.census.gov/acs) to see a PDF copy of the survey

Q: What is the subject definition of each of the questions?

A: Subject definitions can be found on the Census Bureau Web site at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Def.htm>

Q: Why do you ask these questions?

A: The Census Bureau is the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy. All questions are required by law for various programs. Background on each question is provided at: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/fact.htm>

Q: How long does it take to complete the survey?

A: Approximately 38 minutes.

Q: Will there still be a ten-year census?

A: Yes – but the ten-year census will now focus solely on the “short form” which is the official, constitutionally mandated population count.

OPERATIONS:

Q: How do I know this is a legitimate survey, or that the person at my door is a bona fide census worker?

A: Any request for survey information from the Census Bureau will be clearly identified as coming from the **U.S. Census Bureau** and as **OFFICIAL BUSINESS** of the United States. If a Census Bureau employee is at your door, they will:

- Show you their Census Bureau identification badge,
- Tell you the name of the survey for which your participation is needed
- Provide a copy of the notification letter you received or should have received, in the mail describing the survey.

If you have questions about the survey, you may call or e-mail the Census Bureau Regional Office conducting the survey in your area. That number can be obtained from the Census Bureau Web site or by calling 301-763-INFO (4636).

Q: When did the ACS start?

A: The ACS has been tested in select pilot sites around the country since 1996. Since 2000 it has been in every county and city with populations of 250,000 or more. It has been in every county nationwide since January 2005.

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Q: How do you conduct the survey?

A: The survey is conducted using a mailed form. Non-respondents may be contacted by telephone and/or a personal visit. <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/DataColl.htm>

Q: What is the ACS response rate?

A: Overall US response rate in 2003 was 96.7 percent. Rates for states can be found at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/sse/index.htm>. This is the response that includes not only mail response, but phone and in-person interview follow-up. (Go to ACS/Using the Data)

Q: How do you select the addresses?

A: The addresses are randomly selected to ensure a statistically valid sample.

Q: What is the cost of non-response follow-up?

A: It costs about 10 times as much to obtain a response via a personal visit than it does via initial mail response.

Q: How long between receiving the survey in the mail and getting a follow-up call or visit?

A: About 6 weeks.

Q: Is response mandatory?

A: Yes, just as you are required to respond to jury duty, you are also required to respond to the survey should you be randomly selected to do so.

A. *From Legal:* Pursuant to Title 13 U.S.C., Sections 141, 193, and 221, the Census Bureau is authorized to both conduct the decennial census and collect related preliminary and supplementary information. The ACS form, now used each month throughout the decade, is the substitute for the census long form which has been used in previous decennial censuses. The census long form, an authorized part of the every ten year census, has been sent to approximately one out of every six households, and is virtually identical to the ACS form in numbers and types of questions. Thus, since the ACS is the substitute for the legally required census long form, the Census Bureau with Office of Management and Budget, and Congressional approval, uses the mandatory provisions of Title 13 U.S.C. to collect the monthly ACS data.

Q: What is the penalty for nonresponse?

A: The Census Bureau is not a prosecuting agency; our goal is to gather and return to the public quality information about communities and those who provide goods and services. If a fine were to be applied, it would be at the discretion of the Department of Justice and would be \$100 to a maximum of \$5,000.

Q: How does the cost of ACS compare to the cost of the decennial long form?

A: ACS is cost-neutral. Even though we are surveying on an ongoing basis rather than once every 10 years, we have spread the workload and the burden of the 10-year long form over the course of ten years.

Q: How much is ACS costing?

A: The appropriation in 2004, when the sample size was 800,000 addresses, was \$64 million. In 2005, with the survey at an annual sample of 3 million addresses, the appropriation is \$146 million. The President's FY 2006 budget requested \$169.9 million for ACS, which will allow the collection of Group Quarters data.

RESULTS:

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Q: When are ACS results released?

A: Results are released during the summer after the survey's calendar year.

Q: What does a 90% confidence interval mean / lower & upper bounds mean?

A: A 90% confidence interval is a statistical term that means there is 90% certainty that the true answer lies within the listed upper and lower percentages. It is based on mathematical models used for statistics. For more information see [A Basic Explanation of Confidence Intervals](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/techdoc/stcty/ci.html) <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/techdoc/stcty/ci.html>

**Q: What are the data used for?
Why should I respond?
What's in it for me?**

A: Answering the American Community Survey directly affects the amount of Federal and state funding communities receive for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and much more. Roughly \$200 billion is allocated to state and local areas based on long-form data that is currently updated only every ten years.