The American Community Survey

Presented at the “Surveying for Dollars”
Brown Bag Seminar
Washington, DC

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July 26, 2010
Decennial Census History

Since 1790, the U.S. has conducted a census.

In addition to enumerating the population, detailed characteristics were also collected.

In recent decades, two census forms were used:

1. “short” form – basic demographic and housing
2. “long” form – collected more in-depth information from a sample of the population
History of the ACS

1990: Congress expresses interest in more timely “long-form” data.

1996: Census Bureau begins testing a continuous survey in 4 counties, increasing to 36 counties by 1999.

2000: Census Bureau launches Census 2000 Supplementary Survey with a national sample to test the ACS concept on a large scale.

2005: ACS implemented nationwide, replacing census long form in 2010 and beyond.

2006: First ACS estimates (based on 2005 ACS) released for areas with populations of 65,000 and greater.
ACS is Part of the 2010 Decennial Census Program

The 2010 Census counts the population to support apportionment and redistricting.

The ACS supplements this information with annually updated data on the characteristics of population and housing.

The purpose of the ACS is not to count every person in a community or town but rather, to provide a portrait of the community’s characteristics.
Uses of the ACS

ACS data are used in the allocation of more than $400 billion in Federal funds.

For many topics, ACS is the *only* source of Federal population-based statistics for states, communities, towns, tribal lands, neighborhoods, and small population groups.

The ACS has a diverse set of data users including Congress, federal, state, and local governments, academia, media, and the private sector.
ACS Data Collection

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- Mail
- Telephone
- Personal Visit
ACS Language Program

Mail
- Toll free number for telephone assistance
- Respondents can request a Spanish version
- Translated materials such as letters and brochures

Telephone: More than 20 languages used by approximately 180 bilingual interviewers

Personal Visit: More than 50 languages used by approximately 350 bilingual field interviewers
ACS Data Release Strategy

ACS estimates are released in the form of both single year and multiyear estimates.

Users of State and Congressional District data have three sets of data to choose from:

-- 2009 ACS (12 months of data)

-- 2007-2009 ACS (36 months of data)

-- 2005-2009 (60 months of data)

Users of data for neighborhoods, small towns, state legislative districts, census tracts and block groups will ONLY use 2005-2009 ACS.
Of particular interest to Congressional staff are:

- Data profiles (provides comprehensive summary for each State and Congressional District)
- Ranking tables
- Comparison profiles
Planned 2009 ACS Economic Briefs

- Percentage of People In Poverty in the Past 12 Months
- Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months
- Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 16 and Older by Sex
- Percentage Employed in Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations Among the Civilian Employed
- Percentage of Workers Who Drove Alone
- Home Values
- Housing Costs of Mortgaged Owners
- Food Stamp Receipt in the Past 12 Months
- Labor force participation rate of people 65 years and over
- Work status of employed people 65 years and over
2005-2009 ACS Data Release Plans

First time towns and communities with populations less than 20,000 will receive ACS data.

ACS 5-year estimates will be released annually and disseminated through the Census Bureau’s American FactFinder.

Block group data will only be available for download in Summary File format (for more advanced data users).
How to Access ACS Data
## Census Geographic Concepts
### Legal/Administrative and Statistical Areas

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The ACS Compass Products Handbooks

A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data

What Congress Needs to Know

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Compass/compass_series.html

US CENSUS BUREAU
Helping You Make Informed Decisions
The ACS Compass Products Presentations

Fully-scripted PowerPoint presentations on our website

– An Overview of the ACS
– Things that May Affect the Estimates
– Understanding Multiyear Estimates
– Data Products
– Geographic Areas and Concepts
– Introduction to the Public Use Microdata Sample files
The ACS Compass Products
E-Tutorial

Designed to reach novice users and ACS respondents interested in learning more about the survey.

Describes the purpose and benefits of the ACS.

Summarizes the ACS estimates explaining data collection, margins of errors, and the data release schedule.

Demonstrates how to access data on American FactFinder.
For more information about the ACS

Subscribe to “ACS Alert”
http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Special/Alerts.htm

Visit the ACS website:
http://www.census.gov/acs/www

Contact by telephone or email:
301-763-1405
acso.users.support@census.gov