

## **Center for Economic Studies Proposal Review Guidelines**

Research proposals submitted to the Center for Economic Studies for the use of confidential Census Bureau data are reviewed and judged against five major review standards:

- Benefit to Census Bureau programs under Title 13
- Scientific Merit in that the research will contribute to existing knowledge
- Clear Need for Non-Public Data
- Feasibility of success
- Acceptance of all confidentiality protection and disclosure avoidance review requirements

While each of the criteria is important in determining whether to approve a proposal, the project's potential to benefit Census Bureau programs carries the greatest weight.

**Potential Benefit to Census Bureau Programs.** Proposals must demonstrate that the research is likely to provide one or more benefits to the Bureau under Title 13, Chapter 5 of the U.S. Code. If a project has as its *predominant purpose* one, or any combination, of the following criteria, it will be considered to have as its predominant purpose increasing the utility of Title 13, Chapter 5 data.

- Evaluating concepts and practices underlying Census Bureau statistical data collection and dissemination practices, including consideration of continued relevance and appropriateness of past Census Bureau procedures to changing economic and social circumstances;
- Analyzing demographic and social or economic processes that affect Census Bureau programs, and that evaluate improvements to the quality of products issued by the Census Bureau;
- Evaluating or analyzing public programs, public policy, and/or demographic, economic, or social conditions to identify potential complementary datasets, improve data quality, enhance data collection techniques or develop innovative estimation procedures;
- Conducting or facilitating census and survey data collection, processing or dissemination, including through activities such as administrative support, information technology support, program oversight or auditing under appropriate legal authority;
- Understanding and/or improving the quality of data produced through a Title 13, Chapter 5 survey, census or estimate;
- Leading to new or improved methodology to collect, measure or tabulate a Title 13, Chapter 5 survey, census or estimate;
- Enhancing the data collected in a Title 13, Chapter 5 survey or census. For example: Improving imputations for non-response, or developing links across time or entities for data gathered in censuses and surveys authorized by Title 13, Chapter 5;
- Identifying the limitations of, or improving, the underlying Business Register, Household Master Address File, and industrial and geographical classification schemes used to collect the data;

- Identifying shortcomings of current data, collection programs, and/or documenting new data collection needs;
- Constructing, verifying or improving the sampling frame for a census or survey authorized under Title 13, Chapter;
- Preparing estimates of population and characteristics of population as authorized under title 13, Chapter 5;
- Developing a methodology for estimating non-response to a census or survey authorized under Title 13, Chapter 5; and
- Developing statistical weights for a survey authorized under Title 13, Chapter 5.

The proposal should emphasize strongly the potential of the research to benefit Census Bureau programs. Although this is done explicitly in the Benefits section of the proposal, it should be incorporated throughout the proposal narrative. While it is unlikely that any project will provide benefits under every criterion, the reviewer should note the proposed benefits of the project and comment on their feasibility. Stronger projects propose benefits under more than one criterion.

**Scientific Merit.** This criterion refers to the project's likelihood of contributing to existing knowledge. The proposal should describe in some detail:

- The nature and scientific basis of the research questions,
- A description of methodology (including models to be estimated, how model variables will be measured and any hypotheses to be tested)
- The data sets to be used (both Census and non-Census) and
- Expected outcomes from the research.

The reviewer should point out the appropriateness of data and methodology as well as offer constructive comments for any subsequent resubmission.

Each proposal must indicate the potential or approved source of funding for payment of Research Data Center access fees. Evidence that a scientific funding source such as the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health, using a peer review process, has already approved the proposal for support meets this requirement. Such evidence should not substitute, however, for a full discussion of the proposal's scientific qualities. Given that proposals to CES seek access to confidential micro-data, the technical aspects of data and methodology included in the proposal should be fairly detailed. Proposals by graduate students to use Census Bureau data for a dissertation must include a statement by the student's advisor that the research methodology is appropriate for the proposed project and include such an advisor as a co-principal investigator.

**Clear Need for Non-Public Data.** The proposal should explain why publicly available data are not sufficient to meet the project's objectives.

- Can the project's objectives be realized with the use of known publicly available data?
- Can you identify alternative publicly available datasets that the project could use in lieu of confidential Census micro-data?
- Does the proposal make a strong case for access to confidential Census micro-data?

**Feasibility.** The proposal must show that the research can be conducted successfully with the methodology and requested data, and that it can be completed within the requested duration.

- Do the researchers demonstrate their familiarity and experience with the micro-data to be used in the project?
- Can the project be completed in the time frame requested by the researchers?
- Are there aspects of the project (e.g. data linking, preprocessing, geocoding) that might consume extensive amounts of time?

**Risk of Disclosure.** Output from all research projects must undergo and pass disclosure review.

- Do the project's proposed outputs pose an unacceptable risk of disclosure of confidential information?
- Will the project produce tabular and/or graphical output that may pose a disclosure risk?
- Will it take extraordinary effort on the part of CES staff to perform disclosure analysis on the research output?

**Summary Comments and Rating.** Reviewers are encouraged to offer a summary of the proposal's overall merit and its strengths and weaknesses. If the reviewer perceives that either the researchers or the funding source pose a potential conflict of interest, they should note it here.

The reviewer is asked to provide a summary rating of the proposal's overall merit, ranging from Excellent to Poor. Please check only one.