

# Quality Requirements for Releasing Data Products

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*Census Bureau Standard*

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## Document Management & Control \*

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1.0	22 Mar 07	M&S Council and Associate Directors	Initial Release

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\* **The most current version of this document is maintained on the Census Bureau Intranet and may be accessed from the website for the Methodology & Standards Council.**

# Census Bureau Standard: Quality Requirements for Releasing Data Products

## Introduction

The Census Bureau Quality Standards describe required survey or statistical methodology procedures and data product requirements for all U.S. Census Bureau program areas. The Methodology and Standards Council sets these standards, with the concurrence of the Associate Directors of the relevant areas, for Census Bureau data products developed from surveys, censuses, and administrative records.

The Census Bureau has issued five standards governing the dissemination of data products.

1. Review and Approval of Census Bureau Documents and Presentations
2. Dissemination of Census and Survey Data Products
3. Minimal Information to Accompany Any Report of Survey or Census Data
4. Describing the Sources and Accuracy of Tabulations and Estimates
5. Quality Requirements for Releasing Data Products (this standard)

All five standards work together to ensure that the information the Census Bureau publishes is accurate and reliable. In combination, these standards provide the foundation of the quality requirements, describe how customers are informed about the quality of data products, and detail other requirements related to data dissemination.

The Census Bureau's reputation for producing quality data is well deserved. Historically, Census Bureau data products have been high quality, statistically sound, with no identifiable problems, and meet the Public Data Release Criteria described in this standard. The Census Bureau releases them to the public under normal procedures. In rare instances, a product's quality does not meet the Public Data Release Criteria because the data are determined to be statistically unreliable or have unacceptably high nonsampling error. These data may be released, but they must be accompanied by supplemental information describing the problems or concerns.

This standard defines the Public Data Release Criteria and describes how to handle the release of any data products based on surveys or censuses that do not meet the Census Bureau's quality standards.

The Census Bureau is the primary source of high quality statistical data for the Congress, the Executive Branch, and the public. To meet this responsibility, in addition to collecting and analyzing data, the Census Bureau identifies data quality issues, if they exist, anticipates

problems that users might perceive to exist in the data, and addresses issues raised by data users. The Census Bureau provides metadata that accurately describe the data and the concepts measured and that inform users of any known data-related issues.

The Census Bureau recognizes that there are practical limitations to its role of assessing data quality and identifying unanticipated data concerns. The amount, scope, and detail of data collected by the Census Bureau make it difficult to anticipate, identify, and describe all of the potential data problems that might exist in the products produced.

This standard identifies three categories of data. Data in the first category satisfy the Public Data Release Criteria described in this standard. The second category consists of data that do not satisfy these criteria but have published release dates. Data in the second category will always be released. The third category consists of any other data that do not satisfy the criteria; they will be made available only on request. When data from the second and the third categories are released, they must be accompanied by specific metadata, beyond what is required for those in the first category, describing the nature of the quality concerns. This standard does not require that all data that satisfy the Public Data Release Criteria must be released. Often users request custom tabulations that are not part of a normal data release. These custom tabulations may or may not satisfy the Public Data Release Criteria. If these custom tabulations do not satisfy the criteria, the rules for the third category of data apply.

Historically, the Census Bureau has consulted with sponsors and data users regarding official publications and data releases. This practice will continue. Because the public has funded the data collections, the Census Bureau does not intend to withhold data unless their release would violate confidentiality requirements.

Occasionally, concerns may arise about the interpretation and application of this standard. In any such instance, the program managers associated with the project must bring these issues to the attention of the Methodology and Standards Council. The Council, supplemented with six representatives, two each from the Economic, the Demographic, and the Decennial directorates, will address these issues in a timely manner. The manager of the affected program will provide sufficient information to clearly convey the concerns about data quality, interpretation, or application. The extended Council will provide a written statement of its consensus on how to release the problematic data in conformity with this standard and a written clarification of its interpretation and application of the standards. This procedure will facilitate uniformity across the Census Bureau in the interpretation and application of this standard by creating a library documenting the decisions of the Council on specific cases.

## Scope

This standard applies to all public releases of data by the Census Bureau using the results of surveys or censuses. A separate standard will detail the criteria for releasing data products based on administrative records. The Census Bureau has a responsibility to inform sponsoring agencies of any limitations of the data and to encourage sponsors to adhere to the requirements of this



















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