

The American Community Survey

America Is Changing, and So Is the Census

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the cornerstone of the government's effort to keep pace with the nation's ever-increasing demands for timely and relevant data about population and housing characteristics. The new survey provides current demographic, socio-economic and housing information about America's communities every year — information that until now was only available once a decade.

Starting in 2010, the ACS will replace the long-form census questionnaire that was sent to about one-in-six addresses in Census 2000. And as with the long form, information from the ACS will be used to administer federal and state programs and distribute more than \$300 billion a year.

Providing the knowledge needed for better-informed decisions

Between decennial censuses, local governments, organizations and businesses cannot rely on increasingly out-of-date census data to assess and finance local needs, such as where to build new roads, schools or senior centers. Costly mistakes can result when planners do not have current data on which to base their decisions or when local communities do not get a fair share of state or federal funding to help fund local projects.

Annual results will be available for all areas by 2010

Currently, the ACS publishes single-year data for all areas with populations of 65,000 or more. Among the 7,000 areas that meet this threshold are all states, all congressional districts, more than 700 counties and more than 500 places. Areas with populations less than 65,000 will require the use of multiyear averages to reach an appropriate sample size for data publication. In 2008, the Census Bureau will release three-year estimates for areas with populations greater than 20,000. It will release five-year estimates for all areas in 2010. The multiyear estimates will be updated annually, with data published for the largest areas in both one-, three- and five-year formats, and for those meeting the three-year threshold in both three- and five-year formats.

ACS provides a steady stream of knowledge

Since 2005, when the ACS expanded to its full sample size, a sample of 3 million housing unit addresses throughout the United States and Puerto Rico began receiving the survey in the mail every month. Each year, about one-in-40 addresses, or 2.5 percent of the nation's population, will represent their communities when they respond to the survey. Survey recipients that do not respond after a reminder mailing will be contacted by phone, and a subsample of addresses that still do not respond will be visited for an in-person interview. Data collected from group quarters — correctional

facilities, college dormitories, military barracks, nursing homes and the like — began in 2006; that data will be included in ACS releases beginning in August 2007.

Responses are required by law – and they are strictly confidential

Households that receive the American Community Survey are required by law to respond. A federal law, Title 13 of the U.S. Code, provides strong confidentiality protections for all individual information collected by the Census Bureau. Violating this law is a federal crime with serious penalties, including a prison sentence of up to five years and a \$250,000 fine.

For more information, visit the American Community Survey Web page at <http://www.census.gov/acs>.

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