



Dear Public Servant:

Thank you for taking time to review *American Community Survey: A Handbook for State and Local Officials*. This booklet is your reference for questions that may arise from your constituents during the U.S. Census Bureau's launch of the American Community Survey.

The American Community Survey will replace the census long form and enhance your ability to serve your constituents by providing you with more timely information about your community. Data from this survey will be released every year. Armed with more accurate and timely data, you will be able to make better informed decisions by having up-to-date information regarding your jurisdiction, its people, and its resources.

Numerous state and local government officials have seen the value of this information and have endorsed the American Community Survey. In addition, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, National Association of Towns and Townships, and other national organizations strongly support this new program.

Because the American Community Survey is part of the decennial census, responding to the survey is required by law. This mandatory requirement and questions concerning the legitimacy of the survey sometime prompt those selected for the survey to contact local officials. This *Handbook* contains information to help you address these constituent questions and concerns. The Census Bureau stands with you in partnership to help answer your questions and your constituent referrals.

We look forward to serving you and your constituents in the American Community Survey. We are sure this survey will benefit your community for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Louis Kincannon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail.

Charles Louis Kincannon
Director

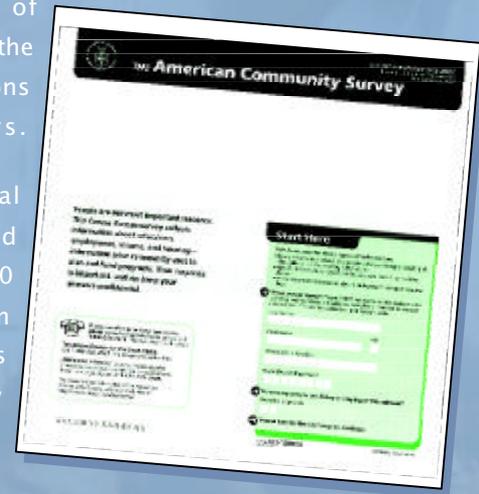


What is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities a fresh look at how they are changing. It is a critical element in the Census Bureau's reengineered census.

The decennial census has two parts: 1) the short form, which counts the population; and 2) the long form, which obtains demographic, housing, social, and economic information. Information from the long form is used for the administration of federal programs and the distribution of billions of federal dollars.

Since the decennial census is conducted only once every 10 years, long-form information becomes out-of-date after a few years. The American Community Survey is a way to provide long-form-type information every year instead of once in ten years. This ongoing survey will replace the long form in future censuses.



State and local governments are becoming more involved in administering and evaluating programs traditionally controlled by the federal government. This devolution of responsibility is often accompanied by federal funding through block grants. The data collected via the American Community Survey will be useful not only to the federal agencies, but also to state, local, and tribal governments.

The American Community Survey can give an up-to-date statistical picture of a community. Community officials can use the data to track the well-being of children, families, and the elderly; determine where to locate highways, schools, and hospitals; and show a large corporation that a town has the workforce the company needs.

How Is the American Community Survey Conducted?

The U.S. Census Bureau selects a random sample from its file of housing unit addresses. An address has about 1 chance in 480 of being selected in any month. No address will be selected more often than once every five years.

When an address has been selected, the Census Bureau mails a prenotice letter informing people living at that address that they have been selected to participate in the American Community Survey. Shortly thereafter, they will receive a survey questionnaire in the mail. They are asked to complete the questionnaire and mail it back to the Census Bureau's National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

If the Census Bureau does not receive a completed questionnaire within two or three weeks, a reminder card is mailed, followed by a replacement questionnaire.

Addresses that do not respond within six weeks of the original mailing will be contacted by telephone or personal visit. Staff of the Census Bureau's telephone call centers attempt to conduct telephone interviews if possible. After four more weeks, a sample is taken of addresses not yet interviewed, and Census Bureau field

representatives make personal visits to conduct an interview in the home.

Because it is part of the census, responding to the American Community Survey is required by law. This is analogous to the mandatory civic responsibility to serve on a jury if called. The duty to respond is set forth in Sections 141 and 193 of Title 13 of the United States Code. This federal law also guarantees confidentiality of the respondent's survey responses and imposes severe penalties for a Census Bureau employee who reveals individual data.



Why Does the Census Bureau Ask Such Personal Questions?

Every question on the American Community Survey is required by federal legislation, administrative regulation, or court decision. The Census Bureau compiles the answers and publishes them for geographical areas of various sizes. Title 13 of the United States Code, Sections 9 and 214,

specify that the Census Bureau cannot publish or release information that would identify any individual.

The information obtained by the American Community Survey is used to manage and evaluate federal, state, and local government programs. Local businesses

also use this vital information. Here are some examples of how responses to the questions are used.

Age and Relationship – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and state and local social services departments use data on age and relationship to plan programs for older people living alone. In addition, businesses servicing the senior citizen market use these data to plan home-based shopping, home health care, and other services.

Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren – Welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 requires the Census Bureau to collect information about grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The American Dream Downpayment Act asks the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Census Bureau to study the needs of grandparent caregivers for affordable housing. Support groups for grandparents responsible for grandchildren use these data to apply for grants.

Place of Birth and Citizenship – The place-of-birth question is asked to measure patterns of movement from place to place within the United States. Also it is used to classify the population as native and

foreign born as required by the Immigration Nationality Act and other federal laws. Community organizations use data on citizenship to estimate how many people are eligible to vote and conduct voter registration drives.

Language Spoken at Home and English Fluency – These questions are used by the U.S. Department of Education to allocate funds to states and school districts under the No Child Left Behind Act. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and local health and social services agencies use these data to tailor their programs to a diverse population. Television and radio stations use this information to define their listening audience.

Disability – This information is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Workforce Investment Act, the Fair Housing Act, and other federal laws. It is used by the Social Security Administration to implement the Supplemental Social Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance programs. The U.S. Department of Labor promotes employment of the disabled. Local community planners use these data to decide where to

locate facilities and services for people with disabilities.



Income – In household surveys, respondents tend to underreport income. By asking about eight specific sources of income, the American Community Survey helps respondents remember all of the income amounts they receive. Information about income is used by many federal, state, and local governments and businesses to tailor their products and services appropriately.

Journey to Work – The U.S. Department of Transportation and state and local transportation departments use information about origins and destinations of journeys to work, travel times, and means of transportation to implement the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century and other federal laws. Banks, dry cleaners, and other businesses need to know when most local residents leave for work to plan the hours they will be open.

Housing Costs – The American Community Survey collects data about housing costs for both owners and renters. The Community Services Block Grant and National Affordable Housing Acts require this information. When combined with data on household income, data on housing costs tell the

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development about the need for housing assistance. Local builders use the data to select sites for new developments.

Housing Value – The Fair Housing Act and other federal laws require this information. The U.S. Department of Justice uses these data to enforce laws against discrimination in housing. Businesses use data on housing values in selecting new office and plant sites. Individuals use these data when making relocation decisions.

Number of Rooms, Number of Bedrooms – The U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development uses this information to determine the Community Development Block Grant amounts and provide Emergency Shelter Grants to eligible jurisdictions. Local governments must consider whether existing housing meets the needs of families living in the community. Developers can use this information to decide whether to build town houses for young singles, starter homes for young families, or retirement apartments.



When Do We Get American Community Survey Data?

The American Community Survey has been in a development phase since 1996. Beginning with tests in four sites, the Census Bureau expanded the survey to every state in 2000.

You can find data products for the United States, the states, and the District of Columbia on the Census Bureau's Web site at www.census.gov/acs/www.

Also, that is where you can find data for many sub-state areas with populations of 250,000 or more.

Hundreds of detailed tables from the latest American Community Survey are posted on the Census Bureau's American FactFinder®. On www.census.gov, click American FactFinder®, then Data Sets, then American Community Survey, then Detailed Tables.

The American Community Survey will be conducted throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico. The American Community Survey will provide data for the same areas that received Census 2000 long-form data, and these data will be updated every year.

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	→							
Annual estimates	≥65,000				→				
3-year averages	≥20,000						→		
5-year averages	Census Tract and Block Group*								→

 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 or areas if there is a probability that an individual can be identified.

What If I Am Asked About the American Community Survey?

Here are some of the questions you may be asked by someone who has received an American Community Survey questionnaire in the mail. The following are suggested responses.

1. What is this survey all about? This survey is part of the census. It is a new way that the Census Bureau is using to collect data about the characteristics of the population throughout the decade rather than once every 10 years.

2. Do I have to answer all of these questions? Yes. You should answer all of the questions. The survey is part of the census, and answering it is required by law (Title 13, U.S. Code). Give your best estimate for items that ask for detailed amounts. Your answers are anonymous.

3. What happens if I don't complete the questionnaire and mail it back? The Census Bureau will contact you, perhaps numerous times, by telephone or personal visit.

4. Why was I selected for this survey when none of my neighbors were? The Census Bureau takes a random sample of addresses (not

people). Any address has about 1 chance in 480 of being selected in any month.

5. How do I know that the information I give will not be used improperly? The Census Bureau will protect the confidentiality of your information. Federal law sets a high fine and imprisonment for any Census Bureau employee who gives your personal data to anyone inside or outside the government.

6. How will my community benefit by having data from this survey? Your community will receive federal funds based on this information for schools, roads, senior centers, and other services.

If you or your constituents require further information, call the Census Bureau regional office in your area. Contact information is on the next page.

Census Bureau Regional Offices

REGION	REGIONAL DIRECTOR	PHONE
ATLANTA Alabama, Florida, Georgia	James Holmes	404-730-3832
BOSTON Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York [except NYC and Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland, and Westchester counties], Rhode Island, Vermont	Kathleen Ludgate	617-424-4501
CHARLOTTE Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia	Wayne Hatcher	704-424-6400
CHICAGO Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin	Stanley D. Moore	708-562-1350
DALLAS Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas	Alfonso E. Mirabal	214-253-4400
DENVER Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming	Susan A. Lavin	303-969-6750
DETROIT Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia	Dwight P. Dean	313-259-1158
KANSAS CITY Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma	Henry L. Palacios	913-551-6728
LOS ANGELES Southern California*, Hawaii	James T. Christy	818-904-6393
NEW YORK NYC, Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland, Westchester counties, New Jersey [Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, Warren counties]	Lester A. Farthing	212-584-3400
PHILADELPHIA Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey [Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Salem, Ocean counties], Pennsylvania	Fernando Armstrong	215-717-1800
SEATTLE Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Northern California*, Washington	Ralph J. Lee	206-553-5837

***LOS ANGELES** - *Southern California*: Fresno, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Tulare, and Ventura counties

***SEATTLE** - *Northern California*: All counties except those covered by Los Angeles



The American Community Survey has been endorsed by over 50 state, local, and tribal government groups and elected officials, including:

U.S. Conference of Mayors

National League of Cities

National Conference of State Legislatures

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund

National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc.

National Association of Counties (NACO)

National Association of Towns and Townships (NATAT)

National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials

International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

National Black Caucus of State Legislators

National Association of Black County Officials

National Association of Regional Councils



