

Explore How a Question Becomes Part of the American Community Survey

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Slides are available at census.gov/data/academy/webinars/2025/how-question-becomes-part-of-ac.html

This webinar is being recorded. The recording will be available after the webinar.

About the U.S. Census Bureau

The U.S. Census Bureau is the federal government's largest statistical agency. Our mission is to serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about its people and economy.



The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a variety of surveys and programs each year, including

- **The Decennial Census** – the once-a-decade population and housing count of all 50 states and U.S. territories
- **The American Community Survey** – the ongoing, annual survey of the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of the nation's population
- **The Economic Census** – the official five-year measure of American businesses
- **The Census of Governments** – identifies the scope and nature of the nation's state and local government sector

The American Community Survey

Outline

- **American Community Survey (ACS) overview**
- How a question is added or revised
- Resources for learning more about the ACS

The American Community Survey

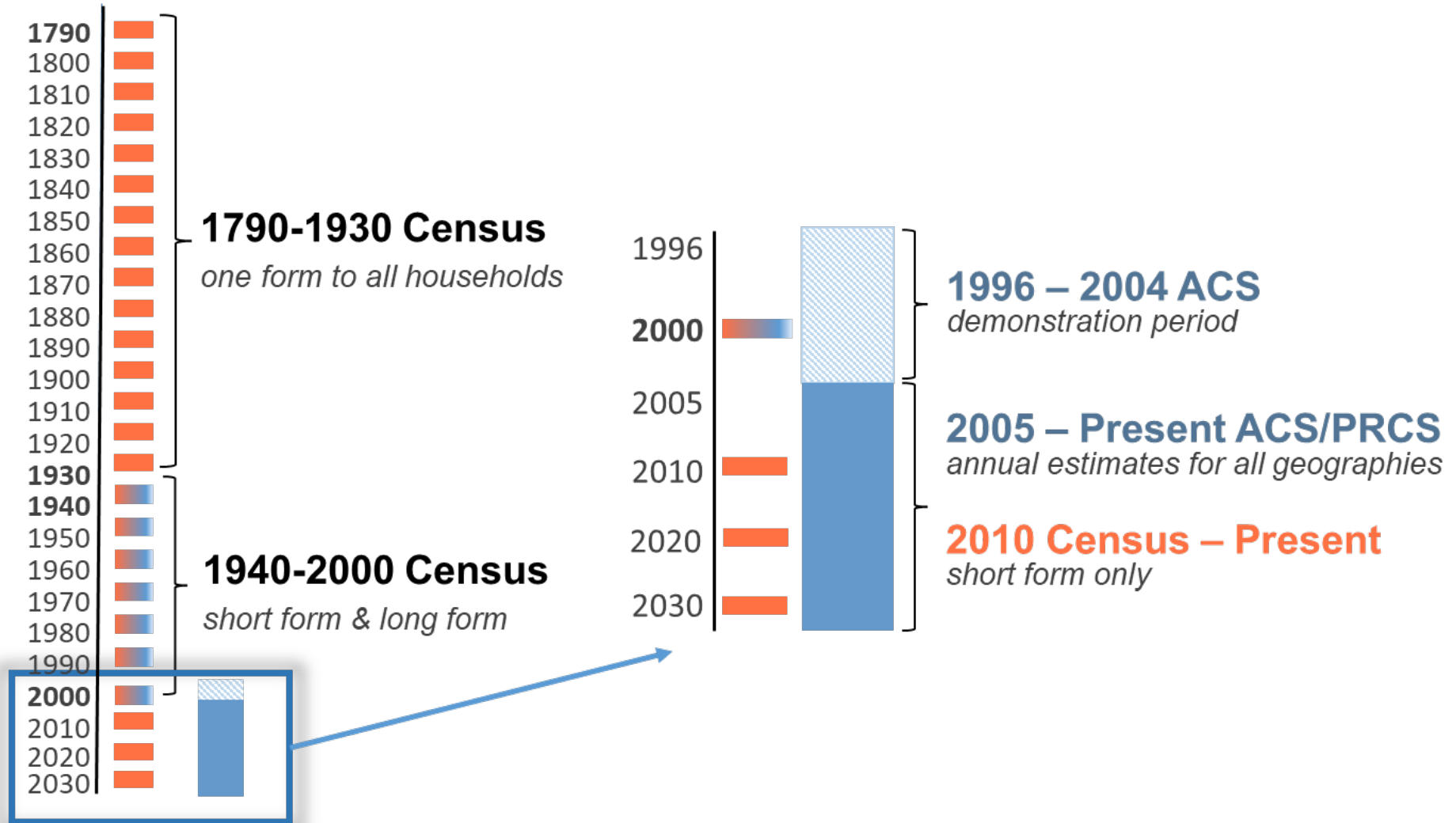
The Foundation

- The American Community Survey (ACS) is the premier source of detailed information about the nation's people and housing
- Surveys **3.5 million** addresses to produce annual social, economic, housing, and demographic estimates for communities throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico
- Covers **40+ topics** — Collects detailed information previously collected by the decennial census each decade
- Helps inform how federal funds are distributed each year, supports over **300** evidence-based federal government uses
- Data released the year after collection as 1-year and 5-year estimates
- Officially started in 2005 (1-year estimates = 2005; 5-year 2005-2009)

The image displays two screenshots of the American Community Survey (ACS) interface. The top screenshot shows the website's login page, titled 'United States Census Bureau American Community Survey'. It includes a 'Welcome! Start here to respond:' section with a link to 'Respond online today at: respond.census.gov/acs'. Below this is a 'User ID' field and a 'Login' button. A 'Can't find the User ID?' section provides instructions on how to find the 13-digit code above the address and to the right of the resident. The bottom screenshot shows the 'Start Here' section of the ACS form. It includes instructions on how to respond (online or by mail), a section for 'Your response is required by law', and a section for 'Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form'. It also includes a section for 'How many people, including yourself, live or stay at this address?' and a section for 'Fill out pages 2-7 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address. Then complete the rest of the form.'

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Census & ACS



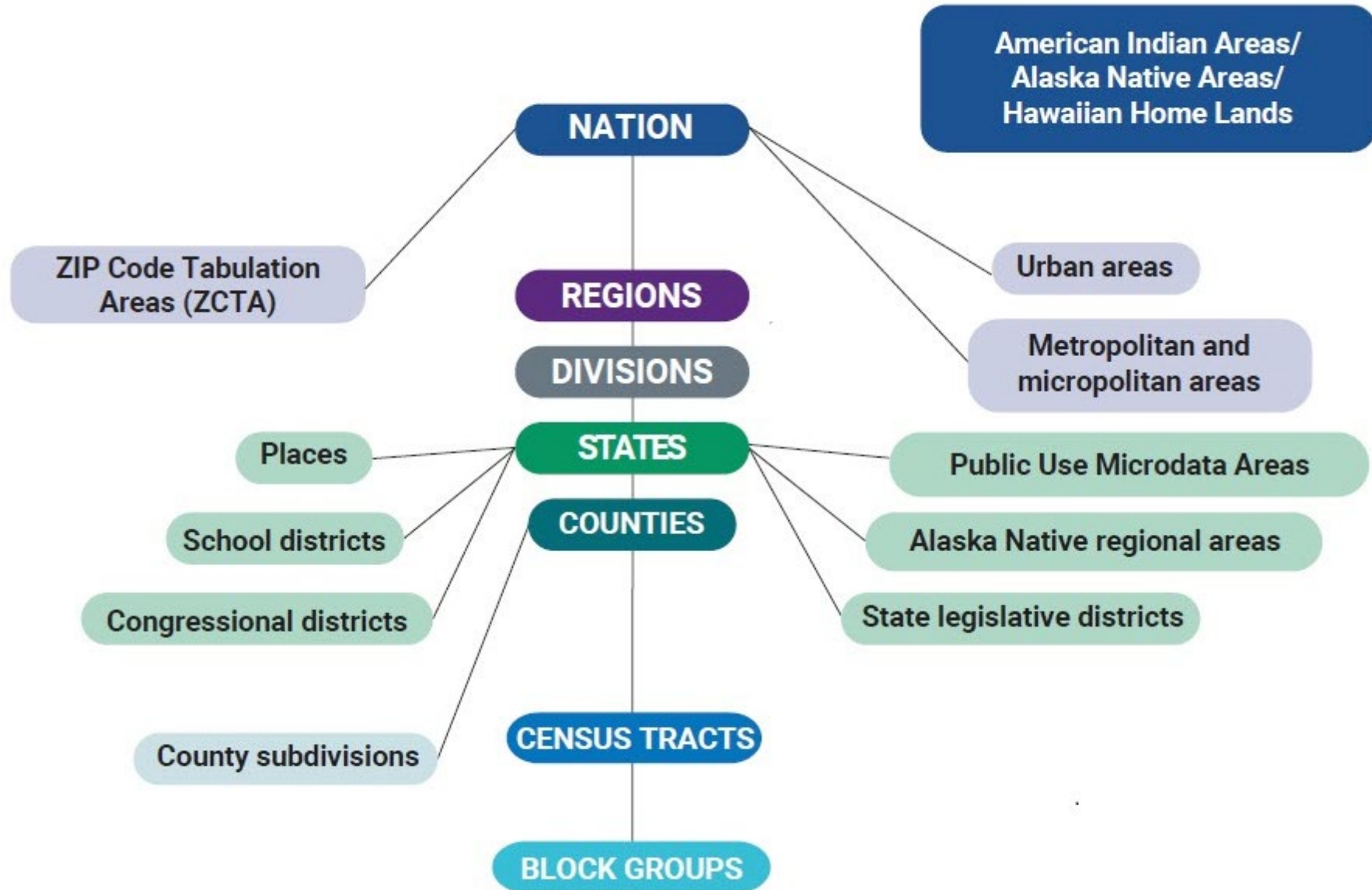
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Content Overview

POPULATION			HOUSING
Social	Economic	Demographic	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancestry • Citizenship Status • Citizen Voting-Age Population • Disability Status • Educational Attainment • Fertility • Grandparents as Caregivers • Language Spoken at Home • Marital History and Status • Migration/Residence 1 Year Ago • Place of Birth • School Enrollment • Undergraduate Field of Degree • Veterans Status; Period of Military Service • Year of Entry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class of Worker • Commuting and Place of Work • Employment Status • Food Stamps (SNAP) • Health Insurance Coverage • Income and Earnings • Industry and Occupation • Poverty Status • Weeks Worked Last Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Group Quarters Population • Hispanic or Latino Origin • Race • Relationship to Householder • Sex • Total Population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedrooms • Computer & Internet Use • Costs (Mortgage, Rent, Taxes, Insurance) • Electric Vehicles • House Heating Fuel • Kitchen/Plumbing Facilities • Occupancy/Vacancy Status • Occupants per Room • Rooms • Solar Panels • Telephone Service Available • Tenure (Owner/Renter) • Units in Structure • Value of Home • Vehicles Available • Year Householder Moved Into Unit • Year Structure Built

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Selected Census Geographic Concepts



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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS

Key stakeholders

- U.S. Census Bureau
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- Federal Interagency Committee for the ACS
- Interagency Council on Statistical Policy Subcommittee on the ACS (ICSP-SACS)
- The public

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ACS Content Requirements

- The content of the ACS is designed to meet the needs of federal government agencies. Questions on the ACS are sponsored by these agencies.
- Criteria for including questions on the ACS:
 - A federal law explicitly states that the data for a topic must come from the ACS and is needed for small populations or low-levels of geography, OR
 - A federal law or regulation requires use of specific data, OR
 - Used for operational needs (i.e., telephone number)

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ACS Content Requirements—Additional Considerations

- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in consultation with the Census Bureau, considers issues like:
 - Frequency of data need
 - Level of geography needed to meet the required need
 - Other available data sources that could meet requestors' needs
 - Respondent burden

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—The Process

Proposal

Testing

Evaluation

Decision

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—Phase 1 Proposal

- A federal agency can propose a new or revised question at any time
 - Rationale for the change
 - The federal law associated with the request
 - Initial ideas for the question change
 - Impact on respondents because of the change
- Most requests come from the Federal Interagency Committee

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—Phase 1 Proposal

- Proposals undergo three reviews:
 - Legal—verifies legal threshold is met
 - Technical—reviews request rationale and technical feasibility
 - Policy—ICSP-SACS considers the merits and benefits to entire federal statistical community
- The ICSP-SACS advises whether the proposal moves forward for testing

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—Phase 2 Testing

- Content development: form topical subcommittees & develop wording options
- Conduct Cognitive testing
 - 1:1 interviews to evaluate how well a person understands and answers survey questions
- Field testing
 - A Federal Register Notice is published soliciting input on test plans
 - New question wording is tested against existing question wording
 - All ACS data collection modes are tested
 - A follow-up reinterview is conducted to assess response reliability

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—Phase 3 Evaluation

- Census Bureau staff conduct statistical analysis of the field test
 - Analysis Plans developed in the testing phase guide this analysis
 - Analysis typically includes comparisons of:
 - Benchmarks
 - Item nonresponse
 - Response distribution
 - Response reliability
 - Other topic specific analysis
- Federal agencies are also part of this evaluation process

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How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS—Phase 4 Decision

- Recommendations are presented to the ICSP-SACS for input
- Federal Register Notices are published about the proposal to change questions on the ACS
- OMB reviews the request
- Census Bureau implements approved changes

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Educational Attainment Question

2024 Questionnaire

What is the highest degree or level of school this person has COMPLETED? Mark (X) ONE box. If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.

NO SCHOOLING COMPLETED

☐ No schooling completed

NURSERY OR PRESCHOOL THROUGH GRADE 12

☐ Nursery school

☐ Kindergarten

☐ Grade 1 through 11 – Specify grade 1 – 11

☒

☐ 12th grade – **NO DIPLOMA**

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

☐ Regular high school diploma

☐ GED or alternative credential

COLLEGE OR SOME COLLEGE

☐ Some college credit, but less than 1 year of college credit

☐ 1 or more years of college credit, no degree

☐ Associate's degree (for example: AA, AS)

☐ Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, BS)

AFTER BACHELOR'S DEGREE

☐ Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)

☐ Professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

☐ Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

2025 Questionnaire

What is the highest grade of school or degree this person has COMPLETED? Mark (X) ONE box. If currently enrolled, select the previous grade or highest degree received.

LESS THAN GRADE 1

☐ Less than grade 1

GRADE 1 THROUGH GRADE 12

☐ Grade 1 through 11 – Specify grade 1 – 11

☐

☐ 12th grade – **NO DIPLOMA**

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

☐ Regular high school diploma

☐ GED or alternative credential

COLLEGE OR SOME COLLEGE

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☐ Professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

☐ Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

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Electric Vehicles Question

- Requested by the Energy Information Administration (EIA)
- Housing-unit level data will help federal agencies:
 - Project future energy needs
 - Make technological and capital changes necessary within the energy infrastructure

14

Do you or any member of this household own or lease an electric vehicle? *Include both all-electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.*

☐ Yes

☐ No


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ACS Main Page



[Partners](#) [Researchers](#) [Educators](#) [Survey Respondents](#) [News](#) [NAICS Codes](#) [Jobs](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#) [Help](#)

[Topics](#) [Data & Maps](#) [Surveys & Programs](#) [Resource Library](#)

// [Census.gov](#) / [Our Surveys & Programs](#) / [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#)

Within Our Surveys & Programs

[About the ACS](#)

[Respond to the ACS](#)

[News & Updates](#)

[Data](#)

[Microdata](#)

[Guidance for Data Users](#)

[Geography & ACS](#)

[Technical Documentation](#)


American Community Survey (ACS)

The [American Community Survey](#) (ACS) helps local officials, community leaders, and businesses understand the changes taking place in their communities. It is the premier source for detailed population and housing information about our nation.

Featured

Respond to the ACS

Learn the different ways to respond to the American Community Survey -- online, by phone, by email. Read our FAQs or call us for more help with the survey.



The American Community Survey

Why We Ask


[← BACK TO TOPICS PAGE](#)

Why We Ask Questions About...

Commuting / Journey to Work

We ask questions about where people work, how they get there, when they leave home, and how long it takes, to create statistics about commuting, or a person's journey to work.

Commuting patterns and characteristics are crucial to planning for improvements to road and highway infrastructure, developing transportation plans and services, and understanding where people are traveling in the course of a normal day.



Your privacy concerns

"I Don't Want Everyone to Know What Time I Leave"

We use your confidential survey answers to create statistics like those in the results below and in the full tables that contain all the data—no one is able to figure out your survey answers from the statistics we produce. The Census Bureau is legally bound to strict confidentiality requirements. Individual records are not shared with anyone, including federal agencies and law enforcement entities. By law, the Census Bureau cannot share respondents' answers with anyone, including companies, other federal agencies, and law enforcement.

Questions as they appear on the form

We ask five questions about a person's journey to work to create a profile of a community's commuting patterns.

[VIEW QUESTIONS](#)

The American Community Survey Questionnaires

13195011

United States[®]
Census
Bureau

American Community Survey

This booklet shows the content of the American Community Survey questionnaire.

Start Here

You have two ways to respond:

Respond online today at:
respond.census.gov/acs

OR

Complete this form and mail it back as soon as possible.

Your response is required by law.

The American Community Survey is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. This survey is one of only a few surveys for which all recipients are required by law to respond. The U.S. Census Bureau is required by law to protect your information.

If you need help or have questions about completing this form, please call 1-800-354-7271.

¿NECESITA AYUDA? Llame al 1-877-833-5625.

For more information about the American Community Survey, visit our website at: census.gov/acs

Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form. We will only contact you if needed for official Census Bureau business.

Last Name _____
First Name _____ MI _____
Area Code + Number _____

How many people, including yourself, live or stay at this address?

INCLUDE...

- ✓ anyone not related to you, like roommates and other families.
- ✓ babies and children, related or unrelated, including grandchildren and foster children.
- ✓ everyone staying here now who has no other place to stay.

DO NOT INCLUDE anyone living somewhere else, such as...

- ✗ a college student living away.
- ✗ someone in the Armed Forces on deployment.

Number of people

Fill out pages 2-7 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address. Then complete the rest of the form.

FORM **ACS-1(INFO)(2025)** OMB No. 0607-0810
(02-28-2024) OMB No. 0607-0936

13265012

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Census
Bureau

American Community Survey

This booklet shows the content of the American Community Survey questionnaire.

This questionnaire is available in either English or Spanish.
Este cuestionario está disponible en español o en inglés.

To complete the English questionnaire, begin on page 2. To complete the Spanish questionnaire, flip this over and complete the green side.

Please complete this form as soon as possible. Place it in the envelope provided and HOLD it for a census representative to return to pick it up.

If you need help or have questions about completing this form, call the number that our census representative has given you.

For more information about the American Community Survey, visit our website at: census.gov/acs

Para completar el cuestionario en inglés, comience en la página 2. Para completar el cuestionario en español, viélelo y complete el lado verde.

Por favor, complete este cuestionario tan pronto sea posible. Colóquelo en el sobre que se provee y GUÁRDELO hasta que un representante del censo lo venga a recoger.

Si necesita ayuda o tiene preguntas sobre cómo completar este cuestionario, llame al número de teléfono que le ha dado nuestro representante del censo.

Para obtener más información sobre la Encuesta sobre la Comunidad Estadounidense, vaya a nuestra página en la internet: census.gov/acs

CENSUS USE ONLY

How was this form completed?

☐ English ☐ Spanish

FORM **ACS-1(GQ)(2025)** OMB No. 0607-0810
(07-23-2024)

The American Community Survey

ACS Content Change Process Page

// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / Research & Methodology / Content Changes

Within Research & Methodology

Agility in Action

Archived Projects

Content Changes

Design and Methodology Report

Disclosure Avoidance

Questionnaire Archive


Sample Size and Data Quality

Content Changes




American Community Survey (ACS) content is designed to meet the needs of federal government agencies and is a rich source of local area information useful to state, local, and tribal governments, universities, and businesses.

However, constraining the content of the ACS is critical due to the mandatory reporting requirement and burden to the American people. Content tests involve the testing, research, and evaluation processes used to determine the best wording, format, and placement of proposed new questions or revisions to existing questions on the ACS. This process ensures that each new or modified question has been carefully considered, tested fully, and will collect quality data without reducing overall respondent participation. If you are interested in learning more about how a question gets added to the ACS, check out the [How a Question Becomes a Part of the American Community Survey](#) infographic, as well as the below [Policy for Adding New Content to the ACS](#) document.

Through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Interagency Committee for the ACS (co-chaired by the OMB and the Census Bureau), more than thirty Federal agencies participate in the review of the ACS instrument. Proposed changes, including new content to the ACS content must meet certain criteria laid out by the OMB and the Interagency Council for Statistical Policy (ICSP) Subcommittee for the ACS. Final question wording must be vetted by ICSP Subcommittee and OMB before field testing. In general, Content Tests evaluate alternatives for questions which show some indication of a problem, for example, high missing data rates,




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Related Information

VISUALIZATION

[How a Question Becomes Part of the American Community Survey](#)



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ACS Design and Methodology Report



ACS and PRCS Design and Methodology (Version 4.0) – Chapter 2: Program History

Chapter 2: Program History

2.1 Overview

Continuous measurement has long been viewed as a possible alternative method for collecting detailed information on the characteristics of population and housing; however, it was not considered a practical alternative to the decennial census long form until the early 1990s. At that time, demands for current, nationally consistent data from a wide variety of users led federal government policymakers to consider the feasibility of collecting social, economic, and housing data continuously throughout the decade. The benefits of providing current data, along with the anticipated decennial census benefits in cost savings, planning, improved census coverage, and more efficient operations, led the Census Bureau to plan the implementation of continuous measurement, later called the American Community Survey (ACS). After years of testing, outreach to stakeholders, and an ongoing process of interaction with key data users—especially among expert statisticians and demographers—the Census Bureau expanded the ACS to the planned full sample size for housing units (HUs) and the household population in 2005 and added the group quarters (GQs) population in 2006.

The history of the ACS can be divided into five distinct stages: design, development, demonstration, full implementation, and continuous improvement. The Census Bureau first proposed the concept of continuous measurement in the 1990s. From 1990 to 1993, design proposals were drafted and vetted. In the development stage (1994 through 1999), the Census Bureau tested early prototypes of continuous measurement for a small number of sites. During the demonstration stage (2000 to 2004), the Census Bureau carried out large-scale, nationwide surveys and produced reports for the nation, the states, and large geographic areas. The full implementation stage began in January 2005, with an annual HU sample of approximately 3 million addresses throughout the United States and 36,000 addresses in Puerto Rico. In 2006, approximately 20,000 group quarters and the population within them were added to the ACS so that the data fully describe the characteristics of the population residing in geographic areas. Since the full implementation stage began in 2005 and 2006, we have been continuously improving. The continuous improvement stage has included a fundamental reexamination of the systems and processes that underlie the ACS and an exploration of new methods, techniques, and approaches designed to improve the ACS program and the Census Bureau's relationships with stakeholders and data users.

2.2 Design Origins and Early Proposals

In 1981, Leslie Kish introduced the concept of a rolling sample design in the context of the decennial census (Kish, 1981). While Kish was conducting his research, the Census Bureau also recognized the need for more frequently updated data. In 1985, Congress authorized a mid-decade census, but funds were not appropriated. In the early 1990s, Congress expressed renewed

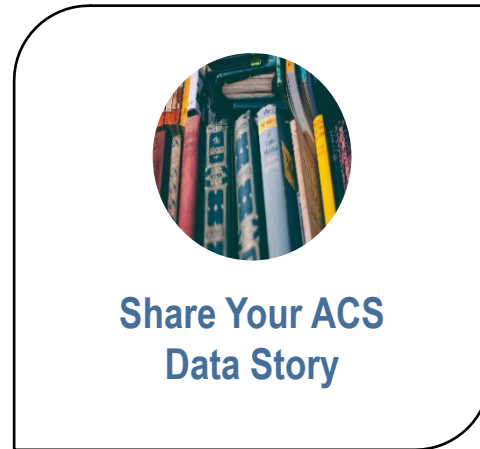
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Find Data and Stay Connected



data.census.gov



**Share Your ACS
Data Story**

census.gov/acs-data-stories



**Join the ACS
Data Users Group**

acsdatacommunity.prb.org



**Sign Up for
Email Updates**

public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USCENSUS/signup/12426

The American Community Survey

Find Answers, Get Support

ACS Data User Support

acso.users.support@census.gov

Census Customer Service Center

800-923-8282

Website

census.gov/acs

Source Us

U.S. Census Bureau, [YYYY – YYYY]

American Community Survey

[1/5]-year [estimates/statistics/data release]