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## Census 2000: A New Path for the Census Bureau

The 2000 census is not far away, and major preparations are already occurring. For the next decennial census, as well as for ongoing programs, the Census Bureau is changing the way it does business. These changes offer the potential for great improvements in how the Bureau collects and disseminates data, but they are not without risks. Now is the time to make your opinion known.

Even though we are at mid-decade, and the decennial census is almost four years away, the Census Bureau is a whirl of activity. In addition to its other, ongoing programs, such as the Current Population Survey, Economic and Agricultural Censuses, and Survey of Income and Participation, the Bureau is preparing for the 2000 census and the changes that census brings. In response to criticism from data users and stakeholders, as well as to budget pressures from Congress, the Bureau has announced major changes for Census 2000. These changes are part of the Bureau's recently announced "New Way of Doing Business". Because census data are used by so many people in the public and private sectors, the new plan and its expected results deserve a closer look.

### Uses and Users of Census Data

Census data are used in many ways. The most basic is that mandated in Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution: an enumeration to be used to reapportion congressional districts every ten years. The Census Bureau allocates other uses to three categories. First, mandated topics are those whose need for census data is specifically stated in federal legislation. Included population topics are age, sex, income, race, education, marital status, Hispanic origin, place of work and journey to work, relationship, language spoken at home, citizenship, place of birth, veteran

status, and year of entry. Mandated housing topics are vehicles available, number of rooms, year structure built, and acreage/farm residence.

Second, required topics are those explicitly required by law, where the law does not specifically state census data are required, but the decennial census is the only source for the topic or the source historically used. These topics include labor force statistics, occupation, industry, disability, class of worker, monthly rent, shelter costs (including utilities), units in structure, number of bedrooms, year moved into unit, plumbing facilities, kitchen facilities, and house heating fuel.

Last, programmatic topics are used for program planning, implementation, or evaluation, or as legal evidence, but federal law does not specifically require that census data be used. They include ancestry, work status last year, residence 5 years ago (migration), children ever born (fertility), year last worked, value of home, source of water, sewage disposal, telephone in unit, and condominium status.

Data users are varied. Federal, state, and local governments use decennial census data to comply with legislative requirements, for programmatic purposes, for redistricting, for service provision, and for grant applications. Nongovernmental users include libraries, chambers of commerce, media, trade and professional associations, retailers and wholesalers, manufacturers, civic and public interest groups, minority, religious, and political

organizations, social service agencies, finance, insurance, and real estate establishments, and private citizens. In 1995, the Census Bureau conducted a survey of non-federal data users to solicit their 2000 census content needs. Nongovernment users predominated as participants in the study, but local governments were the largest single group of participants. However, the respondent pool was diverse: local governments accounted for only 18 percent of respondents. Survey respondents reported higher use of required topics than programmatic topics, and labor force was the most used required population topic. The most used required housing topic was monthly rent. Among programmatic topics, the most used population topic was ancestry, and value of home was the housing topic with highest reported use.

### Reasons for Change

Plans for Census 2000 call for major change: a more accurate census at a lower cost. From 1940 to 1990, each census was significantly more expensive than its predecessor. The 1990 census was criticized by the public and challenged in court. Many groups requested specific changes, and the Census Bureau has responded with the Census 2000 plan. Constituencies requesting change include the National Academy of Sciences, Congress, the General

*See Census, page 4*

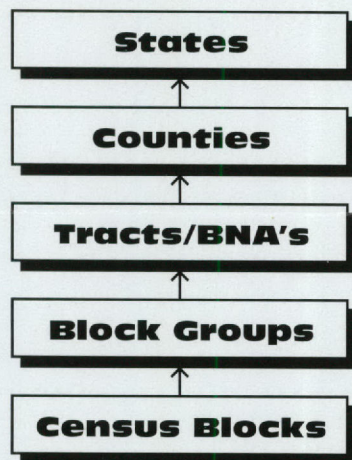
# Terminology

## Census Geography Concepts

Census data are available for many different levels of geography. Some represent legal and administrative entities, such as states, counties, and congressional districts. Others, such as census blocks, block groups, and tracts, are statistical areas established by the Census Bureau. When beginning census research, the first decision to be made is which level of geography to use. For many new data users, this task can be overwhelming, especially when the

products by tabulation block. Usually, the two types of blocks are the same, but collection blocks may be split into two or more parts for data tabulation. Tabulation blocks do not cross boundaries of counties, county subdivisions, places, American Indian and Alaska Native areas, congressional districts, voting districts, urban or rural areas, or urbanized areas. In 1990, the entire United States was covered by census tracts or block numbering areas (BNAs). (Our

### Key Census Geography



Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3 Technical Documentation

areas to be examined are smaller than counties. One of the most basic geographic hierarchies is that of census blocks, block groups, census tracts, counties, and states. In this hierarchy, each smaller geographic entity is wholly contained in the next larger one. For example, counties are made of whole census tracts, just as states are made of whole counties. To use decennial census data effectively, data users should understand this hierarchy.

### Census Blocks

Census blocks are small areas bounded by visible features such as streets, bayous, and railroad tracks, and by invisible boundaries such as city and county limits and property lines. Census data are collected by collection block, and reported in census data

area is covered by census tracts.) Because tabulation blocks are aggregated to tracts or BNAs, blocks do not cross those boundaries.

### Block Groups

Census blocks have three-digit identifying numbers. A geographic block group (BG) is a cluster of blocks with the same first digit within a census tract or BNA. Geographic BG's, which usually contain between 250 and 550 housing units, do not cross census tract or BNA boundaries, but may cross boundaries of county subdivisions, places, American Indian and Alaska Native areas, urbanized areas, voting districts, and congressional districts. For data tabulations, geographic BG's may be split to present data for county subdivisions, places, etc.

### Census Tracts

Census data users will often request census information about small areas: their neighborhoods, perhaps, or the area around prospective locations for businesses. Usually, census tracts are the best geographic areas to use. Why? The Census Bureau defines census tracts as "small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of counties for which the Census Bureau tabulates sample (long form) data". Although census tracts vary in area, tracts in 1990 averaged 4,000 people, and most contained between 2,500 and 8,000 people. Because tract boundaries do not cross county lines and do not change frequently, tract size is relatively homogenous, and census data are readily available for these areas, census tracts are a good place to start when looking at subcounty levels of geography.

### Counties and States

The primary governmental divisions of the U.S. are states, and most states' primary political divisions are counties. Whole census tracts may be aggregated to counties, which may then be aggregated to states. Counties and states are the primary geographic units for Census Bureau data reporting. This geographic hierarchy works well, because county and state boundaries are relatively stable over time.

### Other Classifications

Although tracts do not cross county boundaries, they are often split by city or place boundaries. Additionally, not all areas of the U.S. fit neatly into this geographic hierarchy. For example, the Census Bureau treats the District of Columbia as the statistical equivalent of a state. Finally, many non-metropolitan areas are not covered by census tracts; BNAs are used for those areas.

### Additional Resources

Detailed information about census geography is available in the Geographic Areas Reference Manual, published in November 1994 by the US Department of Commerce.

## Events and Notes

### TEDA/Houston September Meeting

After a summer break in July and August, the Texas Economic & Demographic Association/Houston will meet September 25 at the HESS Building, 3121 Buffalo Speedway. Dr. Richard Murray, Professor of Political Science at the University of Houston, will discuss "Election '96". Meetings are free for TEDA members and \$10 for guests. The presentation is from 5:30-6:30pm, with a reception from 5:00-5:30. Please call Edith Chambers at the Greater Houston Partnership, 713/651-2161, for more information.

### GIS Training at H-GAC

The Data Services Department offers ARC/INFO and ArcView training courses. Featuring small class size and computer exercises using the software, these training sessions are conducted by excellent instructors. Fall courses are forming now. Contact Fardosht Amirpanahi, Senior GIS Analyst, at 713/627-3200, or fardosht@hgac.cog.tx.us, for additional information.

### Get on the Web with H-GAC Online

The Internet allows public organizations to make information available to the public 24 hours a day. Unfortunately, the costs and technical requirements of setting up and maintaining a Web site can be prohibitive for smaller governments and special districts. The Houston-Galveston Area Council can make it easier to establish an Internet presence. Through H-GAC Online, <<http://www.hgac.cog.tx.us>>, organizations can establish an Internet presence easily and inexpensively.

H-GAC offers different service alternatives to local governments and special districts. Organizations new to the Internet can get their feet wet with an initial Web page, and then increase their presences as their needs grow. The most basic option is one page on the H-GAC Web server, but H-GAC Online can create and maintain an entire Web site, including data files for public download via ftp, for your organization. Contact Ellen Forman at 713/993-2453, or ellen.forman@hgac.cog.tx.us, for more information.

### Demographic information on the Internet

Many organizations make demographic data available via sites on the World Wide Web. The Web is a powerful tool, but because it is such a vast resource, beginning researchers are often overwhelmed by the amount of information available. Below are some suggested sites for social and economic data. Most sites are updated frequently, so check these locations regularly.

H-GAC Online	< <a href="http://www.hgac.cog.tx.us">http://www.hgac.cog.tx.us</a> >
U.S. Census Bureau	< <a href="http://www.census.gov">http://www.census.gov</a> >
Texas State Data Center	< <a href="http://www.txsd.c.tamu.edu">http://www.txsd.c.tamu.edu</a> >
Consortium for International Earth Science Information Network	
Demography Home Page	< <a href="http://infoserver.ciesin.org/datasets/us-demog/us-demog-home.html">http://infoserver.ciesin.org/datasets/us-demog/us-demog-home.html</a> >
UT Population Research Center	< <a href="http://www.prc.utexas.edu">http://www.prc.utexas.edu</a> >
University of Michigan Population Studies Center	< <a href="http://www.psc.lsa.umich.edu">http://www.psc.lsa.umich.edu</a> >
Demography and Population Studies	
Virtual Library	< <a href="http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ResFacilities/DemographyPage.html">http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ResFacilities/DemographyPage.html</a> >
American Demographics Magazine	< <a href="http://www.demographics.com/">http://www.demographics.com/</a> >
Texas Health Facts by County	< <a href="http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/programs/shd&amp;pa/getcentyl.htm">http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/programs/shd&amp;pa/getcentyl.htm</a> >
Bureau of Labor Statistics	< <a href="http://stats.bls.gov/blshome.html">http://stats.bls.gov/blshome.html</a> >
Bureau of Economic Analysis	< <a href="http://www.bea.doc.gov/">http://www.bea.doc.gov/</a> >
Department of Health and Human Services	< <a href="http://www.os.dhhs.gov/">http://www.os.dhhs.gov/</a> >
The Population Council	< <a href="http://www.popcouncil.org/">http://www.popcouncil.org/</a> >
National Bureau of Economic Research	< <a href="http://nber.harvard.edu/">http://nber.harvard.edu/</a> >

### What is TIGER?

"TIGER" stands for "Topographically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing" system. It is the Census Bureau's system to automate mapping and other geographic activities tied to the decennial census and other Census Bureau surveys. TIGER started with the 1990 decennial census. It provides support for the creation of the digital geographic data base that covers the United States and its territories. The data base contains the location of streets, rivers, railroads, and similar features, as well as their relationships to each other and to the geographic entities for which the Census Bureau tabulates data.

The TIGER data base was developed from US Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps that the USGS scanned for the Census Bureau. Features such as roads and railroads were also scanned, and the file was modified. The modified file was updated by maps from locals, as well as by field work done by Census Bureau staff. Although the Bureau made the data base as complete as possible, some streets and other features are missing from the TIGER data base. The Bureau hopes to fully update the TIGER data before the 2000 census, but funding limits may preclude such an effort.

TIGER data are available on CD-ROM from the Census Bureau. The data do not come with software for viewing maps. To use the data, a Geographic Information System package, such as ARC/INFO, or mapping software is required. More information about TIGER is available on the Census Bureau's TIGER home page, <<http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/>>. A TIGER FAQ (frequently asked questions list) is available on the site, and users may download a sample data set for TIGER/Line '94, the most recent release.

Census, *continued*

Accounting Office, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Inspector General at the Department of Commerce, and staff on the 1990 census.

Congress, in particular, has made it clear to the Census Bureau that the 2000 census must cost less and produce a more accurate count than the 1990 census. If this census were conducted as the 1990 census was, using traditional methods, it would cost \$4.8 billion, a number that is absolutely unacceptable to Congress members. The Census Bureau's plan for Census 2000 is significantly less expensive, at \$3.9 billion. That request is not assured, however. Congress may refuse to fund the full amount for this census plan. In addition, many members of Congress think that the 1990 long form was too long and confusing and went beyond the Census Bureau's mandate. Some members have even called for the long form to be abolished. Right now, programmatic topics are at greatest risk of not being included in the next census, because those topics are not required by legislation.

## A New Way of Doing Business

The Census Bureau has outlined coming changes in its plan for the 2000 census, which describes a "new way of doing business". At the heart of this plan are four objectives. The Census Bureau will:

- Make every effort to count every household.
- Implement an open process that diverse groups and interests can understand and support.
- Eliminate the "differential undercount" of racial and ethnic groups.
- Produce a "one-number census" that is right the first time.

To achieve these objectives, the Census Bureau has adopted four strategies. The Bureau will:

- Build partnerships at every stage of the process.
- Keep it simple.
- Use technology intelligently.
- Use statistical methods.

## Partnerships

Each of these strategies represents a significant change in the way the Census Bureau conducts its business. The first, building partnerships, expresses the Bureau's commitment to work with a number of different types of organizations on many aspects of the census. The Bureau will form partnerships with state, local and tribal governments and community groups. Locals know their own situations better than the Census Bureau does, and they can assist with correction of maps and address lists, suggest locations for census forms, help advertise the census, and alert the Bureau to potential problems. In the past, the Census Bureau has not shared address lists and other information with locals. This time, the Bureau will ask for local input early in the process. Census address list review is called for by Public Law 103-430, the Census Address List Improvement Act of 1994. Local submission of additions and corrections to the address files is part of the Address List Supplementation program enabled by the same law.

The Census Bureau will also partner with the US Postal Service (USPS). This collaboration should significantly decrease duplication of address information kept by the USPS. Postal Service information will be combined with the address file created by the end of the last decennial census. The resulting file should be more complete and cost less.

Finally, because the Census Bureau recognizes that it can't do it all, the Bureau will contract out some parts of Census 2000 to private organizations. Specifically, the Bureau will contract with private companies to promote Census 2000 to increase the visibility of the decennial census. Also, the Bureau may contract with private firms to manage the facilities where census forms are translated into data files, and to hire and train temporary workers.

## Simplify

The second strategy, "keep it simple", will be accomplished through user-friendly forms, multiple contacts, and more ways to respond. The 1990 census forms, especially the long form that only a sample of the population received, were criticized as

too long and confusing to use. To ensure that the Census 2000 form will be easy to use, the Census Bureau is working with private firms to develop forms that are attractive and easy to follow, and that explain to respondents why they are being asked for information.

To increase responsiveness to the 2000 census and decrease costs, the Census Bureau will use multiple mail contacts. The first contact will be a letter alerting households to the census and its benefits. The second will be the census form itself, with "Your response is required by law" printed on the envelope. Then, a postcard will be mailed, thanking participants and encouraging nonrespondents to return the forms. Finally, the fourth contact will be a form to most nonrespondents with another message encouraging response.

The Census Bureau will provide more ways to respond to the 2000 census. The traditional form of mail contact will continue, but it will be supplemented by forms in stores, malls, community centers, and other public spaces. A toll-free telephone number, with operators who speak English, Spanish, and other languages, will be provided, along with toll-free TDD service for the hearing-impaired. If confidentiality and technical issues can be resolved, responses will be accepted via the Internet. A sample Web-based response form is available on the Census Bureau's Web site at <<http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/2000form.html>>.

## Technology

The Census Bureau will greatly expand its use of technology for the next census, to reduce the expense of inputting, analyzing, and retrieving census data. The 2000 census will use digital capture of forms. The 1990 census was put on microfilm and keypunched, but the 2000 census will be scanned directly into computers using software that can read handwriting. This method means that the forms will be read directly into files for tabulation.

Because census forms will be available in many locations, and many different ways will be used to respond, spotting duplications will be more critical than ever. Matching software will allow the Census Bureau to spot duplications, to prevent counting

records from the same household twice. This method is important for many possible situations, such as when one spouse returns the form in the mail and the other replies by phone from work.

The Census 2000 data set will allow any data user to get the information he or she wants. Point-and-click tabulation will allow access to any level of data, and will remove the need to buy entire printed volumes. Because so much of the census data will be available only in electronic form, this capability is very important.

## Statistical Methods

Finally, the Census Bureau will use statistical methods to produce a cheaper estimate from Census 2000. It is much more expensive to count people who don't respond to the census promptly than it is to count people who do. Respondents who must be reminded to complete census forms cost six times more than those who do not. Using field staff to find missing respondents can cost as much as eighteen times more than those who respond by mail, and the respondents are not always found. For Census 2000, a new methodology will be used to account for nonrespondents. After reaching a target of 90% in each county equivalent, the Census Bureau will draw a one-in-ten sample of nonrespondents. The sample will be used as the base to complete the count. The Bureau will also take a sample of the population (about one-half percent of the total). This sample will be used to obtain accurate results, and these results will be used to check all results. The result will be a "one-number" census, without need for subsequent adjustments. The Census Bureau believes that guaranteeing that 90% of the census district will be found preserves the character of the decennial census.

## Risks

Many new methods will be used for the 2000 census. Relying on new methods means increased risks. If traditional methods are used, these risks are minimized, but the cost savings will be sacrificed. Also, traditional methods do not count every person. New technologies in data capture, processing, and

dissemination have never been used in a census, and because of the cost, backup systems cannot be developed. The Census Bureau will conduct field tests and continue to study the new methodologies using outside experts. In addition, the Bureau will use the best available equipment for these new technologies, and prototype systems will be studied in the 1998 Dress Rehearsal and other tests.

Reductions in local census office staff will limit the Census Bureau's ability to respond to unexpected problems. The Bureau will increase use of sampling and automation to reduce work loads, and will provide ways to respond to unexpected problems. One planned option is to work with locals to get help anticipating and dealing with potential problems.

Privacy concerns cloud building a consensus in support of planned use of other agencies' records (tax returns, Food Stamp lists, etc.). Potential results include limiting the effectiveness of the census, and hindering efforts to reduce costs for this census and future censuses.

## Test Censuses in 1995 and 1996

Because the 2000 census will be so different from its predecessors, the Census Bureau has a number of programs in place to prepare for it. Unfortunately, funding pressures may prevent the Bureau from carrying out all of these programs.

The goal of the 1995 Test Census was to see if the changes proposed for Census 2000 will reduce undercount and cut costs. The Bureau tested new procedures including sampling and estimation, ways to count the undercounted, new partnerships with locals and USPS, new technology, and a new method to collect long form information. Ways to improve the count of the traditionally undercounted include a simpler questionnaire, multiple mailings, new questions designed to include all household members, questionnaires in Spanish to areas with many Spanish-speaking households, questionnaires at many locations, identification of areas with unusual characteristics that historically lead to undercount and targeting of those areas, count of homeless people at service providers (such as soup kitchens), and use of administrative records.

The 1995 Test was conducted in three areas:

Oakland (California), Paterson (New Jersey), and six Louisiana parishes. The Census Bureau found that partnerships on address files still have issues to be resolved. The USPS identification of vacant housing units in Oakland and Paterson was less accurate than expected. Locals may not be able to match administrative records with address files. This matching process must be simpler. The Bureau must create a process to settle address differences by the 2000 census. The simpler address forms and more contacts increased the response rates, as did placing forms in public spaces. The use of new technology helped identify programs that work well, and those that need improvement. Data capture worked well, and matching software is under review. The computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) method improved accuracy and speed of collection, processing, and delivery. However, CAPI interviews were too complicated, address listing needs improvement, and entry of household-member names into CAPI computers should be changed.

The field staff for the 1995 Test interviewed a sample of nonrespondents and used that information for completing totals. The method needs improvement, but CAPI samples, plus the sample from the field staff, look hopeful. Sampling allowed the field operations to complete on schedule for the first time ever.

The primary goal of the 1996 Test Census is to determine which questionnaire yields the best response and which questions provide reliable answers. This test evaluates question wording, format, and order. The results will be used to provide information about topics and wording to Congress in 1997 and 1998.

## Other 1996 Test Programs

Later in 1996, the Integrated Coverage Management (ICM) Test will check the quality check survey. The test is based on the 1995 Test; it develops parts of the survey that couldn't be tested in 1995. The goals are to develop ways to use administrative records in addition to interviews, to determine number of missed housing units, and to determine the number of people in noninstitutional group quarters or with

*Continued on next page*

Census, *continued*

no usual residence. Goals are also to refine methods for assigning missed people to housing units, to improve interviewing with portable computers, and to develop rules for people who move during the census period.

In 1990, the population most often missed was on Indian reservations. As part of the 1996 ICM Test, the Census Bureau will try new ways to count them. The Bureau will refine the survey for use on reservations, try use of tribal administrative records, form partnerships with tribal governments, use new address list and data collection methods, and test an expanded Tribal Liaison program

Another 1996 test, the Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT), is the main test used to evaluate different alternatives for asking race and ethnicity questions. Six different forms will be tested to see how proposed changes affect responses compared with 1990 responses to race and Hispanic origin questions. Those forms include:

- "Multiracial/biracial" category
- "Check more than one" category
- Alternative sequencing of race and Hispanic origin items
- One, combined race, Hispanic origin, and ancestry question
- One, combined American Indian and Alaska Native category
- "Native Hawaiian" category

The test results should be available by January 1997.

## Preparatory Activities

Preparatory activities include working on the ongoing address list project with locals and the USPS. The Bureau will build partnerships with local, state, and tribal governments and community groups and private organizations to improve marketing and advertising, telecommunications and processing systems, and training programs. The Census Bureau is also developing an administrative records methodology to address the issues of appropriate records systems, methods to use the records well, and privacy/security issues. The Census Bureau is conducting presentations and discussions with census stakeholders. These groups include the

Department of Commerce, which is responsible for the census outcome, the OMB, which makes sure the census data meet the needs of Executive Branch departments and agencies who implement programs, the Congress, which approves topics, wording, and funding, and the public.

In addition to address list review and enhancement, the Census Bureau is conducting a number of geographic programs with local participation. The Census Bureau's TIGER system (description, page 3) will be improved. Two TIGER programs are underway. The TIGER Improvement Program allows local governments to help locate street and address range information missing from TIGER. The Census Map Preview Program ensures that locals who don't receive early maps from other sources will receive Census Map Preview map sheets from the Census Bureau. Locals may update these maps with streets and names.

## More Geographic Programs

Other Geographic Area Programs are underway as well. They include the Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS). Normally done by the Census Bureau every year, it was canceled in 1996 due to delays caused by the government shutdowns. The BAS will include all legal entities, regardless of size, from 1998-2000. The Tribal Review Program allows American Indian Reservation and Alaska Native Regional Corporation officials to share changes to their boundaries as shown on census maps. These groups may also participate in the Block Definition Project and Tribal Subdivision Program. Metropolitan planning organizations will update traffic analysis zones and assist with place of work programs.

## Redistricting Programs

Redistricting and district updates are gearing up. The Census 2000 Redistricting Data Program includes the Block Boundary Suggestion Project (BBSP), which allows state redistricting officials to identify features to be used as block boundaries. Later, state officials may participate in the Voting District Project to submit voting district (precinct) and state legislative district boundaries using many of the

features provided during the BBSP. Participating state officials may also update school district and Congressional district boundaries.

## 1998 Dress Rehearsal

One of the most important preparations for the 2000 census is the 1998 Dress Rehearsal. This trial run will allow the Census Bureau to conduct a start-to-finish test of methods planned for use in the decennial census. The Dress Rehearsal will be conducted in areas to be announced soon.

## Continuous Measurement

The Census Bureau has begun testing the American Community Survey (ACS), the data collection arm of the Continuous Measurement System (CMS). CMS will produce estimates of social and economic characteristics of the population for each year between decennial censuses. Beginning in July 2000, it will produce yearly estimates for all jurisdictions with populations greater than 250,000. Annual updated estimates (3-5 year accumulations) will be produced for small areas, including census tracts and block groups, beginning in July 2002. The ACS sample is selected from the Master Address File (MAF), and it will be selected without replacement over a 5-year period. It replicates decennial census oversampling in small jurisdictions (populations under 2,500). 400,000 unique addresses per month will be selected, beginning in 1999. This set will include addresses from every state and most counties: 4.8 million unique addresses each year. Over the three years from 1999 to 2001, about 15 million addresses will be included, which is similar to the long form sample. After 2001, the sample will drop to 250,000 per month. ACS is independent of the decennial census, and the goal is to have both the ACS and the 2000 long form.

The 1996 ACS tests included the words "required by law" on the survey envelopes, which improved response rates. The 1996 test was more successful than anticipated. The three urban test sites were Multnomah County (Oregon), Brevard County (Florida), and Rockland County (New York). The rural test area was Fulton County (Pennsylvania).

A national sample was also used. The 1996 goals were to develop the data collection system, publish "American Community Profiles" using the 1996 data, and improve estimation of survey costs. In the four areas tested, without advertising, the response rates approached those for the decennial census. Mail response averaged 62%, and the overall weighted response rate was 97% (80% without weighting). The test used multiple mailouts, with a reminder card at one week, and a replacement questionnaire at three weeks for nonrespondents.

The test revealed the need to improve administrative records use. Specifically, county estimates for number of people and housing units must be improved, and subcounty estimates for these groups must be developed. In June 1997, public use files will be available for the counties in Oregon, Florida, and New York, and special profile reports will be available for all four sites. Testing will continue in four other locations in 1997.

## Electronic Dissemination

The switch to electronic data dissemination has begun. The Census Bureau recently announced DADS, the Data Access and Dissemination System. The system is part of a transition from printed reports to electronic media. The goal is to provide one electronic system for Census Bureau data—one that is faster, flexible, and cost-efficient. The guiding principles are that geography is the integrating factor, confidential data are protected, metadata (data about data) are available with the data, and a minimal number of printed reports will be produced. Starting with the 1997 Economic and Agricultural Censuses, DADS will enable data users to:

- Define their own data products online
- Access metadata at the same time as data
- Obtain predefined census products: retrieve, display, print, order, fax, download
- Talk to a human "if all else fails"

The Census Bureau's Web site is the main vehicle for DADS. It is currently free, but a subscription service has been announced. This tiered service will allow access to more detailed reports.

## Funding Threats

As the 2000 census approaches, the Census Bureau is in an odd position. At a time when most federal agencies are experiencing budget cuts, the Bureau is entering its upswing. Funding must be increased from mid-decade levels as the decennial census draws nearer. Unfortunately, budget realities make that unlikely. Budget constraints will probably mean that certain programs and tests will be canceled. The 1998 dress rehearsal is crucial, but it may not happen. The Master Address File project is in jeopardy. Use of optical character recognition (OCR) to read scanned census forms may be eliminated. The alternative will be to key in forms (traditional method). The switch will save funds in 1997 and 1998, but will mean that the 2000 costs will be higher. Although the Census Bureau currently plans to do both the simple (short) and sample (long) forms in 2000, budget pressures may limit or eliminate the sample questionnaire.

If you use census information, whether you obtain it through H-GAC, a library, or the Census Bureau directly, these issues should concern you. If the 2000 census is limited in scope, the only public source for a large amount of crucial data is at risk. Write to your member of Congress and your Senators. Tell them how you use census data, and how you will be impacted if this source of information is reduced. Send a copy of the letter to:

Al Mirabal, Director  
Regional Office, US Census Bureau  
6303 Harry Hines Blvd., Ste. 210  
Dallas, TX 75235

## How to stay informed

The Census Bureau's site on the World Wide Web, <<http://www.census.gov>>, is the best place to check for recent press releases and breaking news. *American Demographics* prints Census Bureau news and alerts both in print and on the Internet, <<http://www.marketingtools.com>>. The Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) keeps a close watch on budget decisions that affect the Census Bureau. COPAFS may be reached via phone at (703) 836-0404.

## New Group Forms to Share Data

To allow organizations in the greater Houston area to share ideas about establishing and using information systems, data users and service providers in our area have formed a data sharing group. The group's goals include increasing collaboration and reducing redundancy between collection and dissemination by data professionals, establishing standards for comparable data sets, providing a central point of access to available data sets, and increasing public access to information.

The group, currently called DataNet, has met twice, and has formed committees to address connectivity and organization issues, data standards, current data set inventory, and geographic areas. These committees are meeting during the month of July, and the full DataNet will meet again in August. If you have ideas about data collection and dissemination in our area, or if your organization has data to share, please contact Chris Pollet, United Way Planning & Research Director, at 713/685-2357, or [cpollet@uwtgc.org](mailto:cpollet@uwtgc.org).

## RegionView

RegionView is the quarterly newsletter of H-GAC's Data Services Department.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council is a voluntary association of local governments and elected officials in the Gulf Coast Planning Region. Organized in 1966, it provides a forum for the discussion of area-wide concerns and promotes regional cooperation through comprehensive planning and services to local governments.

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## **News from the Census Bureau**

### **Number of Hispanic-Owned Businesses Increases**

This month, the Census Bureau released its latest report from the 1992 Economic Census. According to the *1992 Survey of Minority-Owned Businesses, Hispanic*, the number of businesses owned by Hispanics in the U.S. increased 76% between 1987 and 1992, from 489,973 to 862,605. For the same period, the increase for all U.S. firms was 26%, from 13.7 million to 17.3 million. Receipts for Hispanic-owned businesses increased 134% during the five years covered in the report, from \$32.8 billion to \$76.8 billion. Receipts for all U.S. firms during the period increased 67%, from \$2 trillion to \$3.3 trillion. Receipts per firm averaged \$94,000 for Hispanic-owned businesses, compared with \$193,000 for all U.S. firms. About 89% of Hispanic-owned businesses were sole proprietorships in 1992. 4% were partnerships, and 7% were subchapter S corporations. C corporations were not included in the report.

### **Many Americans experience gaps in health insurance coverage**

Last month, the Census Bureau reported that 66.6 million people (about 27% of the population) were without health insurance for at least one month during a 28-month period beginning in early 1992. The findings, from information collected by the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), are reported in *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Health Insurance, 1992 to 1993*. The Bureau also reported that 11.9 million people (4.8%) were uninsured during the entire period. The report indicates that insurance coverage is strongly influenced by work status. 87% of those working full-time during the 28-month period were covered continuously by health insurance, followed by 74% of part-time workers, and 58% for those with one or more interruptions in work. Adults between 18 and 24, persons of Hispanic origin, and people residing in the South and West were the age, race, and geographic categories most like to experience health insurance coverage gaps.

### **New Internet Subscription Service**

As part of the Census Bureau's plan to disseminate most data electronically, it announced a new Internet subscription service called "CenStats". The Bureau intends to use the Internet as the primary source for data release, and a large amount of information is already available on the Bureau's World Wide Web site at no charge. CenStats will allow subscribers to access additional information such as electronic images of all reports published by the Census Bureau since the beginning of the year. Basic information will continue to be available free of charge. Users can "test drive" the CenStats service for a limited time. Access is available at <<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/>>.