Three Primary Elements You Must Know to Find Census Bureau Data Transcript

Hi, my name's Mary Leisenring, and I'm a program analyst for the United States Census Bureau. Today, I'm here with Eric Coyle who's a data dissemination specialist, which means he helps people like you and me find census data for all kinds of uses. Hey, Eric, thanks for being here today.

Hi, Mary. I'm happy to be here. What can I help you with today?

The first thing that I am curious about is if it's easy or difficult to find census data?

As you begin your data journey, there are three primary elements that you need to be aware of to help you find census data, where the data come from, or the source or the data, what topics are covered by the various surveys, and what geographies the Census Bureau publishes data for. In addition to counting the US population once every 10 years, the US Census Bureau produces over $1 billion estimates annually. These data come from over 130 surveys and censuses.

Wow, that's a lot. Say I want to find out what the education attainment is for my community. Where would I start?

One thing to understand is that there may be multiple sources for the kind of data you're looking for. Data collected from various surveys and programs are published at different time intervals. For example, some survey data is published monthly. Others yearly or even once every 10 years. Getting familiar with our census surveys will help you to figure out what kind of data is available within a particular survey and what point in time that data was collected. More information on the source of census data is available within our lesson, discovering surveys and censuses.

I will definitely be sure to take that course. So, census data comes from surveys and censuses taken at a variety of time intervals.

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You're right, the Census Bureau measures the economy, people, and places. We published statistics on numerous topics, which include demographic, social, housing, and economic. Defining your topic is a key element in formulating your data question. Since you're interested in education statistics, let's figure out what category that data would be in.

Since I know that I'm looking at social characteristics now, what do I need to know next?

Now that you understand the various topics the Census Bureau has available, the next thing you need to know is the geography. That may impact which survey and data set you need to select. I can tell you the American Community Survey, or ACS, has social characteristic data for many different types of geographies. Mary, you asked about educational attainment statistics in your community. The ACS is the best source of data to find the education that you need. You just need to figure out what you mean by community and the size of your community. For example, if the population of your community of interest is below 65,000, you will need to use the ACS five-year estimates. If the population of your community is above 65,000, you can then decide if you'd prefer to use the one year or five-year ACS estimates.

I see. I have to define my community or my geography. Meaning I have to pick if I'm talking about my city or my neighborhood, and if I want to pick my neighborhood, I have to know the size of the neighborhood or how many people live in it, in order to pick the right data set.

You've got it. That's my understanding. The three key elements is so important. Defining your geography is going to help you determine which data source and data set you are going to use.

Thanks so much, Eric. This really helps me figure out what I need to know to get started.