
Small Populations in the American Community Survey Working Group Report

August 2014

***ACSO AND POP RESPONSES TO SUGGESTIONS
FINAL - March 2016***

Prepared for:
US Census Bureau

Prepared by:
National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations (NAC)
Working Group on Small Populations in the American Community Survey (ACS)

4.3.2 - Conduct small population-based studies to optimize sampling, calculation of weights, data collection, processing and outreach for ACS small populations

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the ACS to conduct a quality assessment of ACS SP data accumulated over the five-year intervals where ACS SP data is available.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's suggestion on conducting quality assessments of small population-based studies. In the past few years, the ACS has published several working papers that have assessed the quality of the ACS data for small areas and small populations. Each of the papers listed below can be found at [census.gov/acs/](https://www.census.gov/acs/):

- *Analysis of the ACS and Puerto Rico Community Survey Coverage (2013)*
- *ACS: Sample Representivity for the Nation and Puerto Rico (2013)*
- *ACS: Sample Representivity for American Indian Areas (2013)*
- *ACS Response and Nonresponse Rates for AIAN Geographic Areas (2014)*
- *Reliability of ACS 5-Year Estimates of Race Groups and AIAN Populations (2015)*

4.3.3 - Increase the effectiveness of the ACS housing sampling frame and sample allocation for small populations

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the ACS to combine housing units on Indian Country and Native Hawaiian Homelands with the ACS housing sampling frame;
- We strongly encourage the ACS to test the use of homogenous PSU when seeking SP households as SP often reside in small and largely exclusive residential clusters;
- We strongly encourage the ACS to consider using other data sources (example, administrative records) to improve coverage and representation for SP in the ACS housing sampling frame.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of ACS housing sampling frame for small populations. Currently the ACS uses the Master Address File (MAF) as the base for its housing unit address sampling frame. The MAF receives a large update each decade as a part of the decennial census activities. During the decade, our main source of updates is the Delivery Sequence File (DSF) from the United States Postal Service. We selectively incorporate the new addresses on the DSF to avoid duplication with already existing addresses on the MAF. We regularly evaluate the algorithm that we use to select which addresses are used based on available data. Currently, the 2020 Census program is evaluating several administrative record sources that could be used to enhance our knowledge of the residents and/or occupancy status of addresses on our MAF. The ACS continues to monitor the progress that the 2020 program is making on using these external sources and seeks ways to translate similar benefits to the ACS frame.

During the decade, our main source of updates is the Geographic Support Systems (GSS) where tribal, state, and local governments provide addresses for their jurisdictions and the Delivery Sequence File (DSF) from the United States Postal Service. We selectively incorporate the new addresses from the GSS and the DSF. ACS is taking into account new addresses from GSS partners, in that they would be eligible for selection for the ACS sample each year.

The ACS presently does not use a clustered design in its housing unit sample design. One of the principal reasons for doing so is to improve the reliability of estimates for the general population. Clustering the sample in order to improve the reliability of select SP would need to be balanced with the effect on the overall population. As stated in the recommendation, the necessity of having relatively current information on where the clusters of SP are located would be a critical part of the success. It would also be necessary to establish a practical threshold for which the ACS could effectively devise a cluster sample that would yield estimates with acceptable reliability.

4.3.4 - Continue full implementation and enforcement of Executive Order 13175 on ACS related functions to achieve accurate and reliable estimates on American Indians and Alaska Natives enrolled in federally recognized tribes as well as non-federally recognized tribes

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Indian tribes and Alaska Natives to improve the sampling frame, development and implementation of education and outreach activities for Native Americans.

RESPONSE

Question about sampling frame is addressed in section 4.3.3.

We appreciate the committee's encouragement of ACS establishing regular consultations and collaboration efforts with the Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives (AIAN). The Census Bureau has a long-standing history of working with the AIAN populations on collaborative efforts in support of census surveys and programs. The American Community Survey Office (ACSO) has developed an AIAN stakeholder plan in collaboration with the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs Office. This document is a stakeholder engagement plan that provides a strategic approach for ACSO to engage more effectively with the AIAN Program. It is a collaborative effort between the ACSO and the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs (OCIA) to develop specific activities to meet identified communications goals and activities. To ensure the successful implementation of the strategies, Census Bureau leadership has appointed a tribal affairs specialist within the OCIA. This specialist will advise the ACSO in developing ACS tribal outreach plans on behalf of the Census Bureau and ensure proper implementation and execution of "government-to-government" protocols.

The Census Bureau is conducting tribal consultation meetings and a national webinar with federally-recognized tribes across the country as part of our on-going government-to-government relations with the 566 federally recognized tribes. These meetings will provide a forum for tribes to share insights, make recommendations, and discuss concerns related to the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau has a number of programs related to the 2020 Census to discuss with tribal

governments and these early meetings are only the start for continued communication on topics such as tribal enrollment, tribal lands put into trust, data needs for the tribes, new modes of data collection, and the tribal government liaison program. These meetings started in October 2015 and will end March of 2016.

As we develop our tribal consultation schedule for the next year, as well as towards planning for the 2020 Census, we continue to take an active role in facilitating ongoing regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration to improve education and outreach activities for the AIAN population. Our Director has formal meetings scheduled until the end of April and has stated his support for future formal meetings. Our Regional Directors continue to support these efforts in their one-on-one meetings with tribes within their regions. We also continue to partner with other organizations and agencies, and when invited to do so, will participate in their annual conferences and regional meetings to support consultation efforts.

4.3.5 - Improve data collection on race and origin for ACS small populations

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau efforts to update its coding for race, nationality, and ethnicity for an accurate enumeration of ACS SP;

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement of our efforts to update the coding of race, nationality, and ethnicity data. As part of our efforts to improve the accuracy of the 2020 Census and future American Community Survey data on race and ethnicity, the Census Bureau is undertaking research in the 2015 National Content Test and the 2016 American Community Survey Content Test to collect and provide detailed data for the myriad racial, ethnic, and national origin groups, including newly emerging small population groups in the United States. Research experts from the Census Bureau's Population Division are updating and improving the race/ethnic/origin code list so that responses representing detailed national origins and ethnic groups from around the world will be efficiently and accurately coded and classified. As part of this research, Population Division researchers are consulting with external experts on various race and ethnic communities in the United States to obtain feedback on the coding and classification lists that we are developing for the 2020 Census and future American Community Surveys.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau to update its ancestry coding for and accurate enumeration of ACS SP by ancestry group;

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement to update ancestry coding. As part of our research and planning for the 2020 Census and future American Community Surveys, we are updating the code lists in the 2015 National Content Test and the 2016 American Community Survey Content Test for classifying and tabulating data on race, ethnicity, and ancestry groups. The overall objective for this research is to test alternative designs of the race and ethnic questions to ascertain the best way to elicit and collect data on major race/ethnic categories, as well as myriad detailed responses for numerous communities. This research will inform recommendations on

how to collect and tabulate these important data for many communities in the future.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau to include a question on sexual identity to the ACS.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement to include question on sexual identity to the ACS. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) manage content changes in the decennial census and surveys through an interagency process. Decisions on new content are reached through careful consideration and public input, and linked to a federal, legislative, or programmatic need for the data. At this time the Census Bureau does not have plans to test questions about gender identity or sexual orientation for the 2020 Census or the American Community Survey (ACS).

The Census Bureau, however, is a member of the OMB's Federal Interagency Group on Improving Measurement of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) populations in Federal Surveys, and the Census Bureau continues to work with OMB and other federal agencies to examine the changing requirements and data recommended for program implementation. Additionally, a measure of sexual orientation was recently included in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) conducted by the Census Bureau and sponsored by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

The Census Bureau is committed to reflecting the information needs of our changing society. The Census Bureau is constantly examining the effectiveness of census and survey questions to collect accurate data on families and people and works with the National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations and the Census Scientific Advisory Committee on recommendations for changing population needs.

4.3.6- Collect and produce demographic, social, economic and housing data on emerging population groups

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to conduct research and collect data on sexual identity;

RESPONSE - Please see response in section 4.3.5.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the ACS to conduct research on the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) populations for the ACS;

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement and support for our efforts to conduct research for the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) population in the United States. As part of our research, we are evaluating the use of a distinct MENA response category in the 2015 National Content Test and the 2016 American Community Survey Content Test. The results from the 2015 National Content Test will provide information on how respondents of Middle

Eastern and North African heritage in the United States self-identify given different options for reporting their race/ethnicity, and which approaches most accurately reflect their identity.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the ACS to produce briefs on ACS SP.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement to ACS to product briefs on SP. We are currently exploring the possibility of producing analytical briefs on small populations using ACS data in FY2016. This research is dependent on funding levels and resources.

4.3.7 - Increase staffing, cultural training and awareness on ACS small populations for the Census Bureau headquarters and Regional Office staff

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to include members of SP on its administrative and field operation activities to increase effectiveness and quality for ACS SP data.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's suggestion on including members of SP in its administrative and field operations. The Census Bureau has a long-standing history of recruiting and retaining staff with appropriate skills, as well as staff that mirrors the diversity of the nation. In doing so, we are able to do a better job, to be sensitive with all segments of the population when collecting information and creating products that meet the needs of all customers.

Census Bureau staff in the field, including Field Representatives (FR) and Data Dissemination Specialist are hired within their local areas and taking in consideration the populations they are going to serve. Our Field Division and Customer Liaison and Marketing Services Office (CLMSO) strive to hire a workforce that mirrors our population's gender, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and educational attainment levels. Cultural awareness training plays a big role in all our hires preparation to work in the field. The Field Division staff has a training package called "*Respecting the Respondent*" which deals specifically with the cultural sensitivity of working with the public. All newly hired FRs are required to complete this training when they come onboard. In addition, CLMSO is in the process of developing a training curriculum for Data Dissemination Specialists that will include cultural awareness training. The 2020 Census staffing model also places an emphasis on recruiting and hiring qualified local field staff. We will begin ramping up our hiring for the 2020 Census in 2017.

4.3.8 - Increase and sustain Census Bureau partnerships targeting ACS small population non-governmental, community-based organizations and Tribal leaders' advisory groups

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage Census Bureau and ACS to partner with SP community-based and faith-based organizations, researchers and leaders in the development;
- We strongly encourage the ACS to develop and maintain regular communications with SP

partnership organizations.

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement to the Census Bureau in increasing and sustaining partnerships with small population non-governmental and community-based organizations. The Census Bureau maintains a continuous effort to engage established partnerships with communities and stakeholders across the nation on the ACS. During non-decennial years, the ACS Program works with the regional Data Dissemination Specialists to improve upon our relationships with partners. During the decennial period, the ACS Program works with Field Division's Partnership Program in establishing new relationships and communicating the importance of the on-going ACS Program.

4.3.9 - Increase the ACS communication and outreach activities for ACS small populations

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to develop bi-lingual, bi-cultural outreach activities and information relevant for ACS SP;

RESPONSE

We agree that it is important for the Census Bureau and the American Community Survey Office (ACSO) to develop bi-lingual, bi-cultural outreach activities and information relevant for ACS SP. ACSO has developed a Spanish language version of the ACS Information Guide, and Informational Brochures about the ACS are available in 10 different languages at <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/language-brochures.html>. The Census Bureau has Data Dissemination Specialists (DDS) across the country that routinely give presentations and provide trainings to small groups from a variety of backgrounds on whatever topics they request. In addition to English, some of our DDS speak Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, or Chinese. ACSO staff and DDS attend conferences, trainings, and workshops (such as Reservation Economic Summit) throughout the year in order to conduct outreach with groups that might not otherwise be aware of ACS.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to update the ACS website design features to provide relevant information and products for ACS SP;

RESPONSE

The current ACS website offers robust content for small populations and was redesigned just this past year as part of the agency-wide initiative to modernize census.gov. One example of website content with high relevance to small populations is a newly established webpage on 2015-2016 Research featuring, among other reports, the [Agility in Action](https://collab.ecm.census.gov/div/acso/program/rl/Information%20Memo%20Series%20Library/ACS%20INFORMATION%20SERIES%20MEMORANDUM%20No.%202015-05.pdf) (<https://collab.ecm.census.gov/div/acso/program/rl/Information%20Memo%20Series%20Library/ACS%20INFORMATION%20SERIES%20MEMORANDUM%20No.%202015-05.pdf>) planning document describing current and near-term research efforts to reduce respondent concerns and survey burden. The site also has an ACS Library (<http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/library.html>), which includes many materials useful to small populations, such as publications and working papers, outreach materials, infographics, and more.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to conduct webinars on ACS SP activities and products;

RESPONSE

Regarding webinars, for the past several years, ACS has offered a robust webinar series to provide education on the various ACS data products as well as how to access them in order to support, among other uses, the needs of small population groups. Most webinars specifically targeted to small population topics and concerns can likely be prepared and presented, budget permitting. A schedule of our webinars and other events is posted on our web page at:

<http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/events.html>.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to develop educational and outreach materials relevant for ACS SP;

RESPONSE

We appreciate the committee's encouragement for ACS to develop educational and outreach materials relevant for SP. The Census Bureau contracted with Sabre Systems and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) in establishing the American Community Survey (ACS) Data User Group (DUG). The goal of the group is to help data users communicate with each other about key ACS data issues and applications.

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to support ACS Data User conferences' and include sessions on ACS SP issues and findings;

RESPONSE

An ACS DUG website and online community provides the opportunity for data users to network and provides the Census Bureau with a broader understanding of the uses of ACS data. The online community consists of 1,400 members from non-profit and for-profit organizations, colleges/universities, federal/state/local governments, etc. Members can join several groups, including "ACS Data for Small Geographic Areas and Population Subgroups." Membership is free and open to all ACS data users.

Through this group, two ACS Data User Conferences have been held since 2014. Most of the sessions discussed topics highly relevant to small populations. Examples of papers presented from these conferences include:

- *People with Disabilities in Rural America*
- *Creating Small Area Health Indicators with ACS 5-Year Estimates*
- *Producing Synthetic Estimates of Children's Health and Well-Being for Local Areas*
- *Using the ACS and PRCS to Estimate State-Level WIC Eligibility*
- *The EEO Tabulation: Measuring Diversity in the Workplace*
- *Developing a Measure of "Sub-Standard Housing" Using the ACS*
- *Housing Landscape: An Examination of Sever Housing Cost Burden Among Working Households*

- *Evaluating ACS Data on School-Age Children Who Speak English with Difficulty*
- *The Underrepresentation of Young Children in the ACS*
- *Small Populations and the ACS: Sampling Variability and Reliability*

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to support outreach and dissemination of ACS materials/products for ACS SP.

RESPONSE

Concerning direct outreach to specific groups, ACSO has established internal partnerships within the Census Bureau to deliver sessions on accessing ACS data via a range of retrieval tools, and to explain how ACS data support the needs of various small populations. These sessions include events sponsored by, for example, the State Data Center network, the Census Information Center network, and the Census Bureau’s network of Data Dissemination Specialists working nationwide in local communities across the Census Bureau’s six regional offices. We agree with the SP Working Group that, budget permitting, providing more of these and other activities to reach an even broader range of population groups would be beneficial.

4.3.10 - Explore new and emerging communication channels and technological innovations to improve data collection and expand coverage and outreach for ACS small populations

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the ACS to consider using a variety of ARTPD and Tribal registries to combine with the ACS housing sample frame.

RESPONSE

We agree with the committee’s encouragement to explore new and emerging communication channel and technology to improve data collection. The Census Bureau is exploring whether alternative data sources, including administrative records, can be used to replace some of the questions included on the ACS questionnaire. We are conducting research on evaluating the integration of the external data into the ACS, and to compare distributions between ACS data and external data sources for any measurement issues that are identified. This research is intended to be a first look at the various topics to document the coverage, quality, and availability of external data sources for potential ACS integration, and will enable ACS to evaluate the potential of the replacement data sources, identify challenges, and provide direction for further research.

4.5.1

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau to conduct an in-depth review of the ACS small population based data, sampling, data collection and processing, as well as weighting procedures to ensure high quality and reliability of estimates.

RESPONSE - See our responses to 4.3.2 and 4.3.4

4.5.2

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to develop a better understanding of the issues and concerns of ACS SP by utilizing the expertise of Census Bureau advisory committees, stakeholder partnership program, and regional office networks.

RESPONSE

We agree with the committee's recommendation. We are currently re-structuring our approach to communications and outreach and that includes focusing our efforts in communities that are traditionally hard-to-count. Part of these efforts will be hearing more from the Census Bureau Advisory Committees, the Census Information Centers, and the Data Users Group and our Data Dissemination Specialist in the field, to develop a targeted communications approach.

4.5.3

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to develop survey reports for ACS SP using the 5-year ACS data.

RESPONSE

We agree with the committee's encouragement and, in fact, the American Community Survey is reviewing its data products as well as dissemination methods and channels for a potential redesign of some or all areas and processes. We will include the suggestion for reports focused on small populations in our review and evaluation of the ACS data products.

We are currently reviewing new value-added data products that provide simplified tables that could be released for smaller geographies or populations. The Census Bureau is also exploring a revised display or re-package of data for small populations and geographies that would make it easier for data users to search and navigate to information about a specific population. Pending resource availability, the Census Bureau will also explore the development of reports or briefs on small populations using the ACS 5-year data.

4.5.4

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to develop customized outreach products for small population groups and Communities.

RESPONSE

We agree that it is important for the Census Bureau and the American Community Survey Office (ACSO) to develop customized outreach products for small population groups and Communities. The American Community Survey Office (ACSO) has developed respondent materials, data products, and an user guidance in Spanish. In addition, respondent materials, such as letters and brochures have been prepared in multiple languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. One-page brochures for specific groups also have been prepared, for example, on American Indians and

Alaska Natives and the Veteran population.

5. MOVING FORWARD - FUTURE WORK SUGGESTED

5.1

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS convene a National Academy of Science panel to investigate the quality of ACS SP data and cost efficient strategies to improve the quality, reliability and communication of estimates.

RESPONSE

We support the committee's encouragement to work with the National Academy of Science (NAS) in strategizing cost efficient improvements to quality and reliability of communication efforts. Currently, our scheduled activities with NAS for Spring 2016 are related to reducing respondent burden and focus on mail messaging, administrative records, matrix sampling, and group quarters. We can however, continue to work with NAS, budget pending, in the near future on the development of activities to support small populations.

5.2

STATEMENT

- We strongly encourage the Census Bureau and ACS to increase outreach and public engagement to stakeholders, data users and policy makers interested in SP demographic, social, economic and housing data.

RESPONSE

We agree with the committee's encouragement to increase outreach and public engagement with SP. The Census Bureau contracted with the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) in establishing the American Community Survey Data Products Redesign Group (DPRG). This is an informal (non-advisory) group. The goal of the DPRG is to support the Census Bureau's innovation efforts in offering new or redesigned data products via a newly designed data dissemination system. The group will provide feedback on many aspects of the ACS data products, including the current product line, thresholds and filtering, and our plan to engage stakeholders. They also will test and provide input on new dissemination methods/tools to meet evolving end user expectations. The DPRG consists of 19 members from a wide spectrum of data users and stakeholders including local governments, and non-profit organizations dedicated to serving hard-to-count populations.

CLOSING STATEMENT FROM ACSO

We appreciate the committee's suggestions on ways to enhance communication and outreach activities for small populations. We are in the process of revamping our ACS Communications Plan to build upon existing efforts in reaching out to small populations; to come with a targeted approach to different areas of the country and hard to reach populations; to educate on the importance of the ACS; and in the process increase participation in the ACS. Budget permitting, this will include targeted educational and outreach materials.