Overview

• Definition of a census tract
• History of census tracts
• How census tracts are updated each decade
• How to compare census tract boundaries decade to decade
Definition

• Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county.
  – Uniquely numbered in each county with a numeric code

• Census tracts average about 4,000 inhabitants
  – Minimum Population – 1,200
  – Maximum Population – 8,000
Map of census tracts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>First census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>First delineation of small geographic areas called sanitary districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Dr. Walter Laidlaw suggested the delineation of permanent, small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>geographic areas that would retain their boundary census to census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Dr. Laidlaw divided NYC into “districts” and asked Census to do the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same for seven other cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Dr. Laidlaw published data by district for NYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Howard Wipple became chairman of the Committee on Census Enumeration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Areas and promoted the use of census tracts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## History of the Census Tract

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>The census tract became an official geographic entity for which the Census Bureau would publish data for. Census tracts covered major cities and block number areas (BNAs) covered many other cities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>The number of BNAs increased and the criteria of the BNA matched the census tract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Census tracts and BNAs covered the entire nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The BNA concept was retired and census tracts were defined nationwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>100th anniversary of the census tract.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Updating Census Tracts

- Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP)
  - Program offered once every 10 years
  - Local involvement in delineating statistical areas
  - Census tracts are split or merged, depending on population change
  - The new 2010 census tracts were released as part of the 2010 TIGER/Line Shapefiles beginning in December 2010.
Updating Census Tracts

- Census tracts are designed to be relatively permanent over time.
  - Any changes are documented so data can be compared from decade to decade.
- Census tracts with more than 8,000 people are split into 2 or more tracts and are given an extension to their existing numeric code.
- Census tracts with less than 1,200 people are merged with a neighboring tract and are given a new numeric code.
- Small boundary corrections are sometimes allowed as well.
Census Tract Relationship Files

• Files that show how 2000 census tracts relate to 2010 census tracts
• One record per each 2000 census tract/2010 census tract spatial set
  – The area that is uniquely shared between a 2000 census tract and a 2010 census tract
• Three sets of files
  1. Census Tract Relationship File with population and housing unit information and area measurement (both national and state-based files)
  2. Substantially Changed 2000 Census Tract Files (both national and state-based files)
  3. Substantially Changed Census 2010 Census Tract Files (both national and state-based files)
Maps & Data

Maps & Data

Find geographic data and products such as the TIGER/Line Shapefiles, KMLs, TIGERweb, cartographic boundary files, geographic relationship files, and reference and thematic maps.

Maps

- Census Data Mapper
- Reference
- Thematic
- Maps Available for Purchase

Data

- TIGER Products
- Partnership Shapefiles
- Relationship Files
- Gazetteer Files
- Block Assignment Files
- Name Lookup Tables
- Telines
- LandView

Geographic Data

TIGER Products

Geospatial Files and Applications from our MAF/TIGER database. Tools for use in GIS software, Web Mapping Services (WMS) to use in your applications, and browsers to view geographic data.

Partnership Shapefiles

The Partnership Shapefiles are used in our partner programs to share data with and capture data from our partners.

Relationship Files

Relationship files help users compare different vintages of geography, such as Census 2000 blocks to 2010 Census blocks in text format.

Gazetteer Files
Relationship Files

These text files describe geographic relationships. There are two types of relationship files; those that show the relationship between the same type of geography over time (comparability) and those that show the relationship between two types of geography for the same time period.

Geographic Relationships Over Time (Comparability)

These files show the relationships (comparability) for the same type of geography over different periods of time (e.g., the relationship between places in 2010 and places in 2000).

+ Block Relationship Files
+ County Subdivision Relationship File
+ Place Relationship File
- Tract Relationship Files

The 2010 Census Tract Relationship files are provided as a tool to help data users compare the universe of Census 2000 tracts to the universe of 2010 Census tracts. From these files, data users may determine how Census 2000 tracts relate to 2010 Census tracts and vice versa. The links below provide more information about the relationship files, including format and layout, as well as a link to the files. Also see the Congressional District relationship files section above for the 113th Congressional Districts to Census Tract relationship files.

- Overview of the 2010 Census Tract Relationship Files
- Understanding the 2010 Census Tract Relationship Files [PDF]
- Download the 2010 Census Tract Relationship Files

2010 Census Tract Relationship File Format and Record Layout
Census 2000 Tract Relationship Files

Urban Areas Relationship Files

Geographic Relationships Between Entity Types
To visualize the tract relationship files, you can use our TIGER/Line shapefiles or the tract outline PDF maps.
The TIGER/Line shapefiles can be found at http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/tiger.html
The census tract reference maps can be found at http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/
No Change
Merged
Split
Questions?

Call us at 301-763-1128
Email us at geo.geography@census.gov