

**American Community Survey  
Fiscal Year 2014 Content Review  
Complaints Analysis**

FINAL REPORT

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Objective**

The overall objective of the American Community Survey (ACS) complaints analysis was to systematically organize complaints about the ACS by category and topic and link the specific ACS question to the complaint. The specific objective was to analyze the number of complaints about each question using pre-specified criteria. The complaints data was one of the nine data streams that directly fed into the Decision Criteria Algorithm to determine the potential candidate questions for removal.

### **Scope**

The scope of the complaints analysis included emails, phone calls and hard copy correspondence received between January 1 and May 31, 2014. This effort coincided with the implementation of performance measures associated with complaint information and helped ensure standardized responses. Specifically, the following types of correspondence were included in the analysis:

- Emails: Direct, GovDelivery, Non-Controlled
- Letters: CQAS congressional, CQAS non-congressional
- Phone Calls: Call Center, Direct, Other Sources

### **Methodology**

In January 2014, ACSO staff began logging the above-listed correspondence in a Communications Log database maintained on SharePoint. The correspondence was organized by category and topic. The GovDelivery correspondence had not yet been included in the Communications Log and was still being maintained in a separate database. Therefore, the data analysis sub-team compiled the complaints data in two stages:

1. A report was run on each Communications Log topic. The totals for each topic were then linked to specific ACS questions.
2. The sub-team manually reviewed 249 GovDelivery emails to identify complaints that could be linked to specific ACS questions. If the correspondence could not be linked to a specific ACS question, it was not included in the compiled results.

The results of the Communications Log reports and the GovDelivery manual review were added together, and the total complaints for each question were included as one of the nine data streams that directly fed into the Decision Criteria Algorithm.

The Complaint clusters were pre-specified in the design criteria as follows:

- No complaints: scale = 0, points added to cost score = 0.
- Some complaints: scale = 3, points added to cost score = 7.8
- Top 3 number of complaints: scale = 5, points added to cost score = 13

Because there was a tie for the top 3 number of complaints, four questions were included in the top tier.

## **Summary**

Because of high volume of complaint data, several people analyzed the data. Additionally, there was not a clear operating definition of a complaint at the time the data were analyzed, so the results from the three sources (i.e., emails, letters, and phone calls) may have been inconsistent. The number of reported complaints may have been too high; however, due to the high volume and short timeframe, the data analysis team decided to accept the results as is.

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of the American Community Survey (ACS) Content Review was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the usages, justification, and merit of each question on the ACS. The goal was to minimize the reporting burden imposed on a subset of households while providing quality information to federal, state, local and tribal governments along with business decision-makers.

The overall objective of the American Community Survey (ACS) complaints analysis was to systematically organize complaints about the ACS by category and topic and link the specific ACS question to the complaint. The specific objective was to analyze the number of complaints about each question using pre-specified criteria. The complaints analysis was one of the nine data streams that directly fed into the Decision Criteria Algorithm to determine the potential candidate questions for removal.

The scope of the complaints analysis included emails, phone calls and hard copy correspondence received at Census Bureau headquarters between January 1 and May 31, 2014. This effort coincided with the implementation of performance measures associated with complaint information and helped ensure standardized responses. Specifically, the following types of correspondence were included in the analysis:

- Emails: Direct, GovDelivery, Non-Controlled
- Letters: CQAS congressional, CQAS non-congressional
- Phone Calls: Call Center, Direct, Other Sources

Details regarding the complaints analysis process are outlined in the methodology below.

This document directly supports the findings described in the American Community Survey (ACS) Fiscal Year 2014 Content Review Results Final Report. For more information on the ACS Content Review, see the Content Review web page:

[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about\\_the\\_survey/acs\\_content\\_review/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/acs_content_review/)

## 2 Methodology

The complaints analysis included the correspondence described below.

Correspondence Type	Definition
Email - Direct	Emails received via Lotus Notes
Email - GovDelivery	Emails logged in the GovDelivery database
Email - Non-controlled	Emails received as a result of the Paperwork Reduction Project and forwarded to ACSO by the OMB Ombudsman
Letter - CQAS (Congressional)	Official controlled correspondence from Senate and House members
Letter - CQAS (Non-congressional)	Official controlled correspondence from other official sources (not Senate or House members)
Letter - Non-controlled	Letters from the general public
Phone Call - Call Center	Phone calls received at the Census Bureau Call Center and then transferred to ACSO
Phone Call - Direct	Phone calls directly received by ACSO
Phone Call - Other Sources	Phone calls received at the Census Bureau and transferred to ACSO

All but one of the above-listed correspondence types was logged into a Communications Log that was maintained on a SharePoint site. The correspondence logged in the GovDelivery database was maintained separately at the time of the analysis.

An additional correspondence type - “Letter - Non-controlled - No Response Necessary (NRN)” was not included in the analysis because this type of correspondence was general in nature, did not require a response, and was not a typical source of question-based complaints.

## 2.1 Communications Log Correspondence Results

Correspondence in the Communications Log was organized by Category and Topic.

### Categories:

- Address problem
- Addressed to Resident
- Age/Illness/Death
- Behavior - Field Representative
- Behavior - Telephone Interviewer
- Complaint - General
- Complaint - Government
- Confidentiality/Privacy/ID Theft
- Constitutionality
- Decennial Confusion
- Decline to Participate
- Invasive/Intrusive
- Legitimate
- Mail Response Problem
- Mandatory (Title 13)
- Online Response Problem
- Phone Call
- Question - General
- Request a Questionnaire
- Selection
- Time to Complete

### Topics:

- Age/Birth Date
- Ancestry
- Citizenship/Place of Birth
- Commuting/Place of Work
- Computer/Internet
- Disability
- Education/School Enrollment
- Employment Status/Labor Force
- Fertility
- Food Stamps/SNAP
- Group Quarters
- Health Insurance
- Housing - Cost
- Housing Rooms
- Housing - General
- Housing - Plumbing/Kitchen
- Housing - Utilities
- Income/Earnings
- Industry/Occupation
- Language
- Marital Status/History
- Migration
- Name/Phone Number
- Poverty
- Race/Ethnicity
- Relationship
- Sex
- Veteran Status

A report was run on each Communications Log topic. Regardless of the category, the totals for each topic were then linked to specific ACS questions and considered complaints.

## 2.2 GovDelivery Correspondence Results

The sub-team manually reviewed 249 GovDelivery emails to identify complaints that could be linked to specific ACS questions. Of the 249 emails reviewed, the sub-team identified 38 complaints that were linked to specific ACS questions. If the correspondence was not a complaint or if the complaint was of a general nature that could not be linked to a specific ACS question, it was not included in the results.

## 2.3 Complaints Analysis

Complaints about the ACS were examined and associated with questions so that counts could be obtained. The results of the Communications Log reports and the GovDelivery manual review were added together, and the total complaints for each question were included as one of the nine data sets that directly fed into the Decision Criteria Algorithm. Five of the data sets concerned Benefits, and four data sets, including Complaints, were considered Costs. Each data stream (e.g., Complaints) was calculated individually, and each question on the ACS was thus assessed to obtain the raw results.

The Complaint clusters were pre-specified in the design criteria on a scale of 0 to 5 as follows:

- No complaints: scale = 0, points added to cost score = 0.
- Some complaints: scale = 3, points added to cost score = 7.8
- Top 3 number of complaints: scale = 5, points added to cost score = 13

This value was comprised of counting the number of complaints that have been received at call centers and via letters, emails or phone calls to the Census Bureau or program directors. Since there was a tie for the top 3 number of complaints, four questions were included in the top tier.

## 3 Assumptions and Limitations

### 3.1 Assumptions

- All correspondence would be logged into the Communications Log maintained on SharePoint
- A clear operating definition of a complaint would be provided prior to the time the data were analyzed.
- Reports on the Communications Log would distinguish between complaints against a specific ACS question versus complaints of a general nature.
- The complaint data would be included as one of the nine data streams that directly fed into the Decision Criteria Algorithm.
- Complaint clusters were pre-specified in the design criteria.

### 3.2 Limitations

- Correspondence was maintained two separate systems, i.e., the Communications Log and GovDelivery.
- Because of the high volume of complaint data, several people analyzed the data.
- Because there was not a clear operating definition of a complaint at the time the data were analyzed, the results from the three sources (i.e., emails, letters, and phone calls) in the Communications Log results and the GovDelivery results may not have been consistent.

## 4 Summary

Because of high volume of complaint data, several people analyzed the data. Additionally, there was not a clear operating definition of a complaint at the time the data were analyzed, so the results from the three sources (i.e., emails, letters, and phone calls) may have been inconsistent. The number of reported complaints may have been too high; however, due to the high volume and short timeframe, the data analysis team decided to accept the results as is.