

MARCH 2011

# AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ACS data can be used in drafting congressional testimony, press releases, statements, and letters to constituents; and in conducting legislative research.

### \$450 BILLION

Information from the ACS helps determine how more than \$450 billion in federal funds are distributed each year.

ACS data are available through the Census Bureau's American FactFinder website, [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

Federal agencies, states, and communities need accurate, up-to-date information to make good decisions. The American Community Survey (ACS), a direct descendent of the Census Bureau's decennial census long form, is a nationwide annual survey designed to provide communities with the demographic, social, economic, and housing information they need—when they need it. Information from the ACS helps determine how more than \$450 billion in federal funds are distributed each year.

### What Questions Are in the ACS and What Are They For?

The survey includes questions on a wide range of topics, ranging from basic demographics—age, gender, and race—to questions about work status, education, income, and housing characteristics.

Congress approves the topic and questions included in the ACS according to authority in Title 13, U.S. Code. All of the data in the ACS are required to administer, enforce, or monitor a federal law or program or to comply with a federal court ruling. For more information, visit the Census Bureau's website at [www.census.gov/acs/www/about\\_the\\_survey/questions\\_and\\_why\\_we\\_ask/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/questions_and_why_we_ask/).

### Who Uses ACS Data and Why?

**Congress.** Congress uses ACS data to assess the need for federal assistance and to allocate federal grants fairly, prudently, and to communities most in need. ACS data can be used in drafting congressional testimony, press releases, statements, and letters to constituents; and in conducting legislative research.

**Federal agencies.** ACS data are used by federal agencies to determine eligibility for programs, to allocate funds to communities, and to evaluate policies. For example, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs uses ACS data to evaluate the need for educational, employment, and health care programs to assist military veterans.

**State and local governments.** Information from the ACS is critical for state and local policymakers and planners who need up-to-date information about their communities to evaluate the need for new roads, hospitals, schools, senior centers, and other basic services.

**Businesses.** Corporations, small businesses, and individuals can use ACS data to gauge the sales potential of products and services and to set strategies for expanding or starting a business. For example, a restaurant may use demographic and economic data from the ACS to determine the best location and available workforce to start a new franchise.

### Common Questions From Congressional Constituents

#### I've never heard of the ACS. Is this survey legitimate?

Yes, the ACS is a federal survey conducted under the authority of Title 13, U.S. Code, Sections 141 and 193.

#### Do I have to answer the ACS questions?

Yes. Response to this survey is required by law (Section 221 of Title 13). Respondents are required to answer all questions on the ACS to the best of their ability.

#### Are my survey answers confidential?

Yes. Your answers are confidential by law under Title 13, U.S. Code, Section 9. This law specifies that the Census Bureau can use the information provided by individuals for statistical purposes only and cannot publish or release information that would identify any individual.

#### How do I benefit by answering the ACS?

By responding to the ACS questionnaire, you help your community establish goals, identify community problems and solutions, and evaluate programs.

## Fast Facts for Congress

**U.S. Census Bureau**  
**Fast Facts for Congress**

MAIN GLOSSARY FAQ HELP FEEDBACK

**Can't find what you need?**  
Call the  
Census Bureau's  
Congressional Affairs  
Office: (301) 763-6100,  
cao@census.gov.

Enter an address, a ZIP code, or select a state, county, or 110th Congressional District to view highlights from Census Bureau sources of economic and demographic data.

Locate a District: ADDRESS  ZIP CODE  GO

- OR -

Select a State, District, or County: STATE  GO DISTRICT  GO COUNTY  GO

**Announcements**

**AMERICAN FactFinder**

The **NEW American FactFinder** is now available!  
visit [factfinder2.census.gov](http://factfinder2.census.gov)

**U.S. Population Clock**

17:43 UTC (EST+5) Feb 28, 2011  
**310,906,377**  
more [population clocks](#)

**What's New** ([Latest News](#))

DEMOGRAPHIC LINKS

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Fast Facts for Congress," <http://fastfacts.census.gov>.

## Where Can I Find ACS Data?

You can find ACS data on the Census Bureau's American FactFinder website, [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov). You can also find summary information for congressional districts and other geographic areas through *Fast Facts for Congress*, [fastfacts.census.gov](http://fastfacts.census.gov).

## For More Information About the ACS

The Census Bureau has an "ACS Congressional Tool Kit" that includes:

- Sample questionnaires.
- A letter to constituents.
- Answers to common questions.
- A list of U.S. Census regional offices.
- Quick facts about the importance of participating in the ACS.

The tool kit is at: [www.census.gov/acs/www/about\\_the\\_survey/resources/congress.php](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/resources/congress.php).

For more detail, see the Census Bureau's handbook, *A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What Congress Needs to Know*, available at [www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/handbooks/ACSCongressHandbook.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/handbooks/ACSCongressHandbook.pdf). Or contact the Census Bureau's Congressional Affairs Office: 301-763-6100, [cao@census.gov](mailto:cao@census.gov).



[www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)

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