CENSUS 2000

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Census 2000 is fast approaching and the Indiana State Data Center in the Indiana State Library is anticipating a flood of new statistics and data products. The Data Center cooperates with the Census Bureau in a program that makes census data available to the public through a network of state agencies, libraries, and universities. The Data Center also helps promote access to Census Bureau data through print and electronic formats such as value added data products, CD-ROMs, and Internet sites. Following this article is a list of some recent Census Bureau Products available to the public. Also listed are some short videos that are available from the Data Center to libraries or other community agencies who wish to inform the public about Census 2000 and other surveys, or establish partnership efforts with the Census Bureau.

To ensure an accurate and efficient census, the Census Bureau is seeking to establish partnerships with local communities. Two of the earliest and most critical preparatory steps for Census 2000 are updating the geographic information system, the TIGER (Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing) database, and building a national address list.

Because local communities are knowledgeable about the locations of their streets and addresses, and because this information is critical to the outcome of the census, the Census Bureau began working with tribal, state, and local governments to update the TIGER database over a year ago, and still is actively seeking partners in that ongoing effort.

In addition to the traditional decennial census, the Census Bureau is planning to do a new survey called the American Community Survey. It is a monthly household survey and as part of the Continuous Measurement System, is a new approach for collecting accurate, timely information needed for critical government functions. This new approach will provide more accurate and up-to-date profiles of America's communities every year, not just every ten years. This would mean that community leaders and data users would have more timely information to use for planning public programs for everyone from newborns to the elderly.

The American Community Survey will provide estimates of housing, social, and economic characteristics every year for all states, as well as for all cities, counties, metropolitan areas, and population groups of 65,000 persons or more. For smaller areas, it will take two to five years to sample the same number of households as sampled in the decennial census. For example, for rural areas and city neighborhoods or population groups of less than 15,000 people, it will take five years to accumulate a sample the size of the decennial census. Once the American Community Survey is in full operation, the multi-year estimates of characteristics will be updated each year for every governmental unit, for components of the population, and for census tracts and block groups.

THE GOALS OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ARE:

- To aid state and local officials in meeting their new responsibilities under devolution.

- To provide users with timely, comparative housing, social, and economic data throughout the decade.

- To improve the infrastructure for the Federal statistical system.

With regard to the ongoing controversy over sampling, the following letter from Ann Azari, Chair, Census 2000 Advisory Committee found on the State Data Center listserve may be of interest:

"During the March meeting of the 2000 Census Advisory Committee, many members raised concerns over several key issues. Because we are the Commerce Secretary's 2000 Census Advisory Committee, I write this letter to relay those concerns to you.

In light of on-going public debate, not only on Capitol Hill, but in the media, among statisticians, and throughout the land, we feel strongly that not only the credibility of the Census Bureau, but the census itself is at stake. There needs to be reinforcement that the Census Bureau is a credible, capable, professional organization within the Department of Commerce. The Census Bureau is the best in its class at what they do. People come from all over the world to learn from the Census Bureau. We have to remember that this organization needs to keep about its business of doing the census right.

The Advisory Committee is deeply concerned with the uncertainty regarding the method for conducting Census 2000. The Census Bureau, based upon expert scientific advice, is planning for a process that includes the use of statistical methods in order to conduct a Census that is both more accu-

rate and less costly than prior censuses. At the same time, members of Congress have raised concerns about the operational feasibility, legality, and reliability of the Census Bureau's plans. We understand that the intense debate over the method for conducting Census 2000 may have resulted in a delay in the ultimate decision until at least February 1999. In order to be prepared and make the best decision, complete, accurate, and timely information is critical. Therefore, the Advisory Committee urges the Secretary to prepare and provide the maximum amount of information to the Congress as is needed in order to make an intelligent and informed determination.

It is important to keep in mind an historical perspective as we look at this. It isn't the first time that the Census Bureau has been in controversy. For the 1970 decennial census, the Census Bureau wanted to conduct a 'mail out/mail back' enumeration. This enumeration methodology was controversial because it hadn't been tested on a nation-wide basis. It wasn't until late in the decade that the Census Bureau even knew it was going to be permitted to use that methodology. In a sense, just like with Sampling for Nonresponse Follow-Up today, nobody knew that 'mail out/mail back' would absolutely work in this context. Historical perspective reminds us that the Census Bureau can weather its way through such controversy and that the Census Bureau does have a record of innovation."

And from the National Academy of Sciences: In recent decades, as the cost of administering the U.S. census has risen, the accuracy of the population count has declined. Between 1970 and 1990, census costs increased by $1.3 billion, but the 1990 census missed four million people, an undercount greater than occurred in the 1980 census. As a result, the Bureau of the Census is completely redesigning the census for the year 2000. The new census will use sampling and statistical estimates as key components for achieving a more thorough count at a lower cost.

Sampling procedures are necessary for significantly improving the accuracy and cost efficiency of the census, and there is no reasonable alternative for reaching these goals, says a new report from a panel of the National Research Council. After evaluating results from tests conducted in 1995 on the new design, the panel concluded that redesign plans are moving in the right direction to ensure more reliable data. It recommended refinements in sampling plans that would enhance the quality of geographical data and improve survey techniques.

The new census would begin much like the prior ones, with an attempt to count everyone through an improved mailed questionnaire. Reminders and a second round of questionnaires would be mailed as needed, and questionnaires also would be available for pick-up at public locations. A statistically representative sample of people who fail to respond would then be contacted by census-takers. At the next stage, a large independent sample would be used to estimate those still not accounted for. Statistical procedures would be used to integrate results from each step for the final population count.

In conclusion, the Indiana State Data Center staff hopes that this discussion of Census 2000 and the sampling controversy will help clarify some of the challenges that the Census Bureau faces in its mission to provide timely, relevant and quality data about the people and economy of the United States.

LIST OF RECENT DATA CENTER CENSUS BUREAU PRODUCTS:

REIS 1969-1995 Personal Income and Employment estimates for all counties and metropolitan areas in the United States

LandView III Environmental Mapping Software - Includes database extracts from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Census, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Department of Transportation and others. These databases are presented in a geographic context on maps that show jurisdictional boundaries, detailed networks of roads, rivers, and railroads; census block group and tract polygons, and schools, hospitals, churches, cemeteries, airports, dams, and other landmark features.

Income and Poverty: 1996 - from the Current Population Survey this CD presents poverty and income statistics for several geographic areas, age groups, races etc.

Census Transportation Planning Package: Urban Element -- A set of special tabulations of 1990 census data tailored to meet the data needs of transportation planners. Software is provided to retrieve the data.

Zip Code Business Patterns 1995 - This CD has economic data arranged by Zip Code similar to the Economic Census.

CENSUS VIDEOS

1. Census 2000 Economic Census - January 6, 1998. Run Time 13:29.

2. Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal Advertising Campaign. Run Time 11:32.

3. The Plan for Census 2000. Run Time 7:00.

4. Tiger: Putting America on the Map. Run Time 27:09.

5. Census 2000 Building Partnerships. Run Time 6:30.

Check our out website or call to check out materials. Indiana State Data Center Website address: http://www.statelib.lib.in.us - Click on State Data Center.

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