

# Questions and Answers

American  
Community  
Survey





### **What is the American Community Survey?**

The American Community Survey is a survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in every county, American Indian and Alaska Native Area, and Hawaiian Home Land.

The American Community Survey provides critical economic, social, demographic, and housing information to this country's communities every year. Communities tell us the American Community Survey helps them make informed decisions and is a key to their future.

### **I have not heard of the American Community Survey. How long have you been conducting it?**

The American Community Survey began in 1996 in a sample of counties across the country. Today the survey is conducted in all U.S. counties and in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey.



## How are the answers that I provide to the American Community Survey used?

The questions on the American Community Survey are required to collect data needed to manage or evaluate government programs. These questions are essentially the same questions that have been asked as part of the decennial census.

- *Income* information makes it possible to compare the economic levels of different areas. Many federal and state programs use such data to distribute funds for community development.
- Your answers to the questions on *journey to work* are used by the U.S. Department of Transportation to plan highway improvements, develop public transportation services, and design programs to ease traffic problems.
- Information about *age* is used in federal programs to target funds or services to children, working-age adults, or the elderly.
- Responses to questions about *income and housing* are summarized and used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assess the need for housing assistance for elderly, handicapped, and low-income homeowners.
- Information about *race, Hispanic origin, and language spoken at home* is used to determine bilingual election requirements under the Voting Rights Act and the monitoring of equal employment opportunities under the Civil Rights Act. Race and Hispanic origin (or ethnicity) are considered distinct concepts and, therefore, require separate questions.
- Information about *military service* is used primarily by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to measure



the needs of veterans and to evaluate veterans' programs dealing with education, employment, and health care.

### How do I benefit by answering the American Community Survey?

Federal agencies, states, and communities say that they do not have the up-to-date information they need to better understand community issues, respond to needs, and allocate programs and resources. As one community leader said, "Guessing is always fun, but seldom effective."

By responding to the American Community Survey questionnaire, you are helping your community establish community goals, identify community problems and solutions, locate facilities and programs, and measure the performance of programs.

The American Community Survey data are used by:

- *Local governments* for budgeting, evaluating programs, and planning for community development projects.
- *Community programs*, such as those for the elderly, scout programs, libraries, banks, hospitals, and other community organizations, to provide services to the community and to locate buildings, services, and programs.
- *Transportation planners*, using journey-to-work information, to plan for peak volumes of traffic in order to reduce traffic congestion, plan for parking, and develop strategies, such as carpooling programs and flexible work schedules. Decisions are made to build new roads or add capacity to existing roads, and to develop transit systems, such as light rail or subways, by projecting future needs.



### **Do I have to answer the questions on the American Community Survey?**

Yes. Your response to this survey is required by law (Title 13, United States Code, Sections 141, 193, and 221). The same law protects the confidentiality of the information that you provide.

### **Do I have to answer these questions every year?**

No. Only a small sample of addresses is selected to participate in the American Community Survey. An address may only be selected for the sample once every 5 years. These addresses are selected at random and represent other addresses in the community. That is why it is so important that every sampled household respond.

### **Do I have to answer the survey if I am staying at this address temporarily?**

Yes. If you are staying at the address for more than 2 months, you must complete the entire survey. If you are staying for 2 months or less, you must still complete a portion of the survey, according to the instructions. A Census Bureau representative can assist you. This information helps communities plan as the population changes at different times of the year.

### **Are my survey answers confidential?**

Yes. Your answers are confidential by law under Title 13, United States 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 can I see the results of the survey?

This information is published on the Census Bureau's American FactFinder® Web site at [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov)

The data are provided in several formats for everyone from beginners (who may just want to look at the data) to experienced researchers.

American FactFinder® provides tables that:

- provide an overview of the data quickly,
- compare data for different places, and
- provide more extensive data for more detailed research.

### Can the police or any regulatory agency see my answers to the survey?

No. The Census Bureau protects the privacy of your information. The police cannot see it and no court of law can see it. No one can see or use your specific answers to enforce any type of law.

If any Census Bureau employee were to violate these provisions, he or she would be subject to severe criminal sanctions imposed by Congress—up to 5 years imprisonment and/or up to a \$250,000 fine (Title 13, United States Code, Section 214, as amended by Title 18, United States Code, Sections 3559 and 3571).



**I am elderly, disabled, or otherwise unable to complete the American Community Survey questionnaire. What do I do?**

You may designate another person to help you, or a Census Bureau representative may call you or may come to your house and assist you in completing the survey. Respondents may call 1-800-354-7271 for assistance.

To produce the most accurate results, it is very important that every household selected for the survey participate.

**How can I get additional information about the American Community Survey?**

There are several ways to obtain information about the American Community Survey:

For detailed information, we encourage you to visit our Web site at:

[census.gov/acs](http://census.gov/acs)

or call the Census Bureau's Regional Office nearest to you as listed below:

**Census Bureau Regional Offices**

**Atlanta, GA**  
1-800-424-6974

**Chicago, IL**  
1-800-865-6384

**Denver, CO**  
1-800-852-6159

**Los Angeles, CA**  
1-800-992-3530

**New York, NY**  
1-800-991-2520

**Philadelphia, PA**  
1-866-238-1374



For questions about the American Community Survey data or how to view survey results, call our Customer Services line at:

**301-763-INFO (4636)**

**1-888-346-9682**

You may also contact us by e-mail

**[ask.census.gov](mailto:ask.census.gov)**

or

via U.S. mail at:

**American Community Survey  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Rd.  
Washington, DC  
20233-7500**



# AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



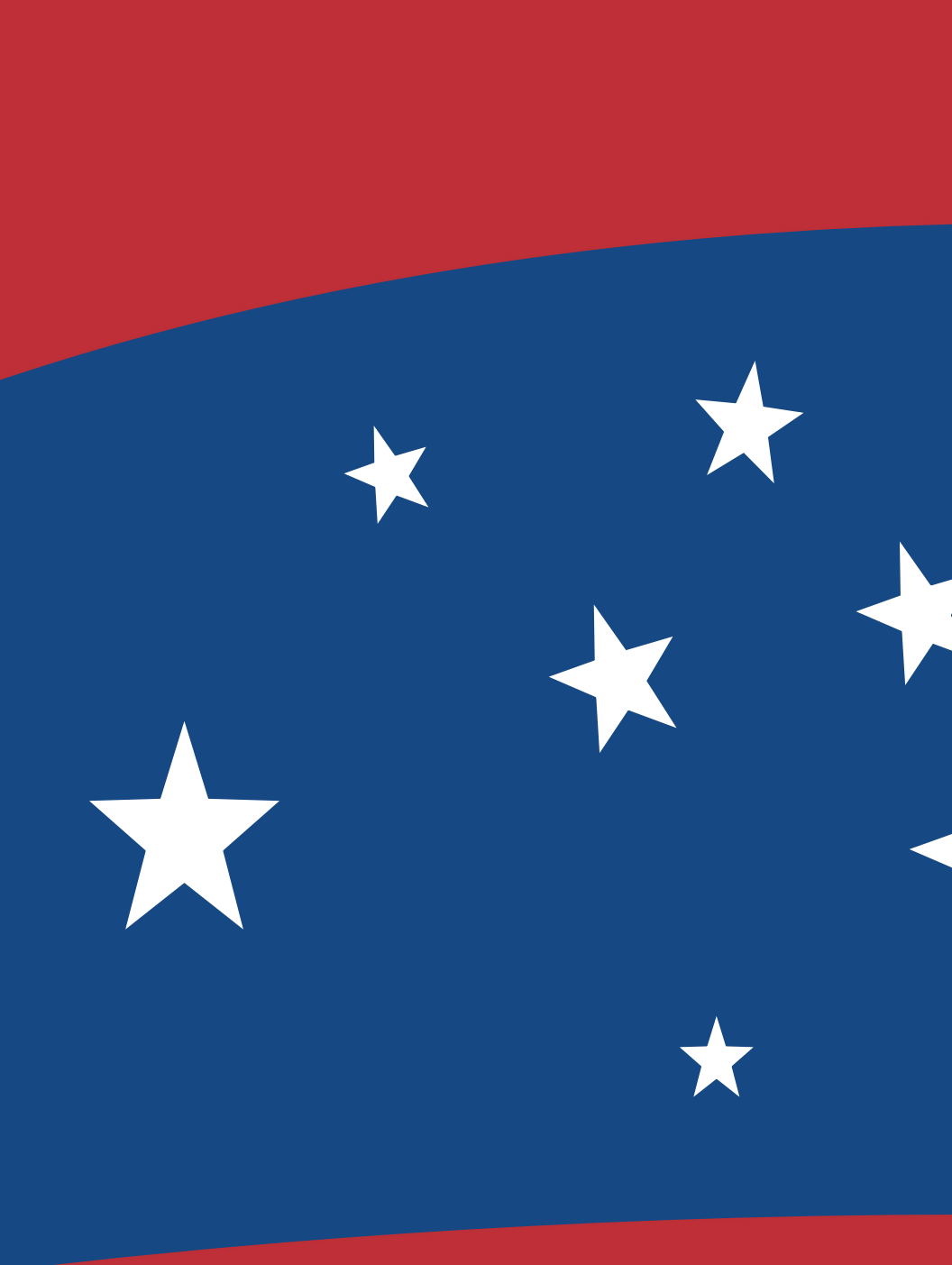
E-mail: [ask.census.gov](mailto:ask.census.gov)



Phone: 1-888-346-9682



Internet: [census.gov/acs](http://census.gov/acs)



ACS-51(HU)  
Issued January 2013

