



THE CENSUS PROJECT

Supporting quality measures of
America's economy and places

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Census Experts: America's Data Infrastructure Remains Seriously at Risk Updated Report Challenges Congress for New Investments

Washington, D.C. – A year after warning the nation that “...America’s essential data are at risk,” a broad-based coalition of census experts today released a comprehensive update to a white paper that issues a clarion call to the nation for new investments in the country’s data infrastructure.

The [report](#) from The Census Project is a detailed status report on the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), especially how pervasive and essential the survey is to power the nation’s economic, social and community progress. The ACS is the official, trusted, and public source of data used by public, private and non-profit sectors in every community across the country.

Each year, the Census Bureau publishes more than 1,000 tables for states, counties, cities, tribal lands, and communities of all sizes, resulting in 11 billion individual estimates from the ACS on a wide range of topics and providing a detailed tapestry of the American social, demographic, and economic landscape. Yet, Congress has neglected important investments in the survey for years, resulting in data quality issues, delayed releases, and declining confidence in the data.

The Census Project Co-Director Mary Jo Hoeksema said, “...for years Congress has asked us for specifics on the value of the ACS and the return on investment for the nation. This report does that, and we intend to update it annually until the needed improvements for the ACS are funded by Congress.”

“In an era of hyper-partisanship, it would be hard to find more broad-based, national, local and non-partisan support for a government program that has proven itself to be essential in the public and private sectors. This report has the receipts,” said Howard Fienberg, Co-Director of the Census Project.

As the country implements a massive investment in the infrastructure of roads, bridges, ports, and broadband, in countless ways the ACS will be the baseline for progress in those efforts, as

well as a planning tool for where best to make those investments. The ACS is unlike any other data source in the nation, providing critical social, economic, housing, and demographic data about our country every year, for communities large and small. Yet, the survey itself has been passed over for investments needed to modernize it and deliver more timely, relevant and higher quality data.

The new report includes support from a bipartisan range of national, state and local experts attesting to the survey's utility and value:

“ACS results are critical inputs to Nielsen’s audience measurement business. At Nielsen, these results are used to estimate the size of various markets and segments. They are also used to ensure that our data sets are balanced properly to reflect the country’s demographic representation and to project audience estimates for key demographic segments.” **Christine Pierce, Senior Vice President, U.S. Media Operations & Data Science, Nielsen**

“The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs depends on ACS data to plan how best to meet the education, employment, and long-term care needs of Veterans and their families in Minnesota. The ACS is the only source of information we have that gives us a comprehensive view of the current economic circumstances of Veterans and their families along with detailed information about where they live within the state.” **Larry Herke, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs**

“For policymakers, ACS data are essential to making policy decisions that meet the needs of their constituents. By knowing the full characteristics of the population they are serving, NALEO members are able to efficiently direct resources and services to help improve the lives of the people they represent.” **Arturo Vargas CEO, NALEO Educational Fund**

“We use ACS data to identify key demographic trends affecting the housing market and provide these insights to our members so they can improve their businesses.” **Nadia Evangelou, Senior Economist, Director Real Estate Research, National Association of REALTORS.**

With fears of a recession looming, critical debates ahead in Congress on funding for essential government programs, and dramatic changes taking place in the workplace and industries such as banking and technology, policymakers need the ACS now more than ever.

ACS data are essential to identify the needs of America’s veterans. They experience [higher rates](#) of mental health, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorders than their civilian counterparts. ACS data about active-duty service, the period of active duty, and service-connected disability status and rating combined with ACS demographic and economic data provide a detailed profile of our nation’s veterans and their needs at the community level. ACS data about veterans help communities administer programs such as the VA Loan Guarantee

program, the post-9/11 GI Bill, and job training and hiring preference programs, and estimate the future demand for these programs and services. Local communities and the federal government need to know the number of veterans eligible to use VA health care, in combination with age, disability, and service-connected disability ratings, to estimate the future demand for health care services and facilities.

ACS data are used every day in government for public program evaluation. While the ACS was not designed specifically for program evaluation, the comprehensive and timely nature of the data can make it a valuable resource for policymakers, planners, and scientists who want to assess conditions before and after a policy or plan change. Since ACS data are collected using the same methods across the United States, program evaluators can also compare outcomes in communities where a policy change has occurred with communities that have similar characteristics but have not implemented the policy change. A city may use ACS commuting data to track trends in bicycle commutes to work before and after expanding a network of local bikeways.

Despite the directive from Congress in [FY 2023](#) for the Census Bureau to use the ACS “as a testbed for innovative survey and data processing techniques,” funding for the ACS has been stagnant for years. The report calls for an increase in ACS funding of just \$100 to \$300 million, to protect the ACS from further data quality deficiencies, enhance non-response follow up operations, increase the survey’s sample size, reduce respondent burden, and develop new data products. Additional funding is needed as well to update the survey’s content to ensure the ACS is accurately capturing data about the nation’s increasingly complex population and households. Investing in the ACS now will yield dramatic dividends for the nation.

The Census Project and its stakeholder partners will be sharing the [report](#) in the coming weeks with Congress and the public.

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The Census Project (<https://thecensusproject.org>) is a broad-based coalition of national, state, and local organizations and companies that support an inclusive and accurate 2030 Census and American Community Survey (ACS) (the modern version of the census “long form”). Its 800+ member organizations and companies, representing the private, public, non-profit, and academic sectors, rely on objective data that the Census Bureau produces to inform evidence-based investment, policy, and planning decisions.