

District of Columbia State Data Center Quarterly Report

Summer 2006

American Community Survey in D.C.

Introduction

Most people are familiar with the census occurring once every ten years. The last census was conducted in 2000 and every household received a questionnaire seeking demographic information about the people in the household. However, since 2000 most communities, most cities, and most states have experienced growth or decline, and other changes that are different from the numbers shown in 2000. New homes have been built, residents have moved in and moved out, new businesses have been established, some people have changed jobs, and the list continues. The impact and implications of these changes have far reaching effects on the public and private sectors that need to adjust to these changes and conduct activities more effectively. Thus, waiting 10 years for new data had increasingly become a problem, so Congress stepped in and authorized the Census Bureau to implement the American Community Survey (ACS) to provide needed data every year, rather than once every ten years.

This report provides information on the relatively new American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau annually. It provides answers to commonly asked questions of the survey's implementation nationally and in the District of Columbia. A series of tables conveying the most current survey results for the District of Columbia is also provided. The State Data Center is hoping that this report will not only inform and educate read-

ers, but encourage District residents to participate and respond to the surveys they receive in a timely manner.

What is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a national survey designed and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau to provide communities with a fresh look at how they are changing. The ACS replaces the census long form as previously used in the decennial census. While the short form counts the total population, the long form obtains demographic, housing, social, and economic information from a sample of the population. Since the decennial census is conducted once every 10 years, the long-form information becomes out-of-date after a few years. Thus, the ACS is a way to provide long form type information every year instead of every 10 years.

Why Does the Census Bureau Ask Such Personal Questions?

The questions on the ACS are required by federal legislation, administrative regulation, or court decision. The Census Bureau compiles the answers and publishes them for geographical areas of various sizes. Title 13 of the United States Code, Section 9 and 214, specify that the Census Bureau cannot publish or release information that would identify any individual.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY *cont. on page 2*

by
Joy Phillips
Robert Beasley



What is the information in the ACS used for?

- The ACS is the only source for annual demographic, social, economic, and housing information for Congressional Districts.
- Provides current information for decision-making and policy development.
- Provides current information for allocation of federal funds and for program evaluation.
- Current information is provided on where to locate new schools, hospitals, and highways.
- The health and well-being of children and their families can be extracted from current data
- Timely and relevant data are available for emergency preparedness

In general, the information from the ACS is used for the administration of federal programs and the distribution of billions of federal dollars. The ACS data can give an up-to-date statistical picture of a community. The ACS will enable jurisdictions to identify trends as they are emerging rather than after they have occurred. The data collected is useful not only to the federal agencies, but also to state, local, and tribal governments.

How is the ACS conducted?

- The Census Bureau selects a random sample from its file of housing unit addresses. About 3 million addresses are selected each year (250,000 sample addresses each month) for the whole nation. An address has about 1 chance in 480 of being selected in any month. No address will be selected more often than once every five years.
- When an address is selected, the Census Bureau mails a prenotice letter informing the people living at that address that they have been selected to participate in the ACS. Shortly thereafter, they will receive a survey

questionnaire in the mail, to be completed and mailed back to the Census Bureau. If the Census Bureau does not receive a completed questionnaire within three weeks, a reminder card is mailed, followed by a replacement questionnaire. If no response, there will be a telephone call, later followed by a personal visit if still no response.

Are ACS data available for the District of Columbia? If so, for which period?

Yes, the ACS data are available for the District for 2000 through 2004. However, the ACS is limited to the household population and excludes the population living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters, which are all counted in Census 2000 decennial data. The ACS began counting group quarter population in 2006. Mailouts are currently in English only but Spanish questionnaires are available upon request. Similarly, phone and personal visits instruments are available in English and Spanish.

What kinds of data are produced by the ACS?

The ACS produces several data products. They include the following:

- Detailed tables – basic distributions of characteristics
- Data profiles – estimates of selected summary characteristics (general demographics, social, economic and housing)
- Ranking tables – states comparisons of survey estimates
- Subject tables – detailed topic distribution
- Selected population profiles – quickly produces report on groups of interest
- Narrative profiles
- Change (multi-year) profiles
- Public Use Microdata Sample files (PUMS) same in the District.

The data profiles are the most common and widely used product of the ACS. The information collected under each characteristic of the data profiles is summarized below.

Demographic Characteristics

- Sex
- Age
- Race
- Hispanic Origin

Social Characteristics

- Education
- Marital Status
- Fertility
- Place of Birth
- Citizenship
- Year of Entry into the US
- Grandparents
- Veterans
- Disability Status
- Language Spoken at Home
- Ancestry/Tribal Affiliation

Economic Characteristics

- Income
- Benefits
- Employment Status
- Occupation
- Industry
- Commuting to work
- Place of Work

Housing Characteristics

- Tenure
- Occupancy & Structure
- Housing Value
- Taxes and Insurance
- Utilities
- Mortgage/Monthly Rent

ACS in the District of Columbia

In the District of Columbia, the ACS has an annual sample size of about 6,000 addresses each year (Table 1). This sample is spread over the 12 months each year, so essentially just under 500 addresses are sampled each month. The ACS is a "continuous survey" meaning that data are collected every month year after year. However, the

AMERICAN COMMUNITY cont. on page 3

ACS data is reported as an annual figure and only for the total District. ACS data is not available by geographic divisions like wards or census tracts.

The District has the lowest survey response rate for a state equivalent but that is explained largely by the reality that it is essentially a large city, not a state. The main reason for non-interviews in the ACS in the District was "no one home" (Table 2). Although

Table 1: District of Columbia Sample Size Selected and Final Interviews

Year	Initial Address Selected	Final Interviews
2004	6,205	3,707
2003	6,138	3,777
2002	5,589	3,493
2001	6,444	3,899
2000	6,677	3,796

Source: US Census Bureau

Table 2: Reasons for Noninterviews

Year	Response Rate	Refusal	Unable to Locate	No One Home	Temporarily Absent	Language Problem	Insufficient Data	Other
2004	84.2	2.6	0.4	4.6	0.1	0.2	0.5	7.4
2003	88.5	4.0	0.5	5.2	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.9
2002	92.3	2.7	0.0	3.9	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.2
2001	90.0	4.0	0.0	4.2	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.6
2000	90.8	2.7	0.0	4.3	0.3	0.1	1.4	0.4

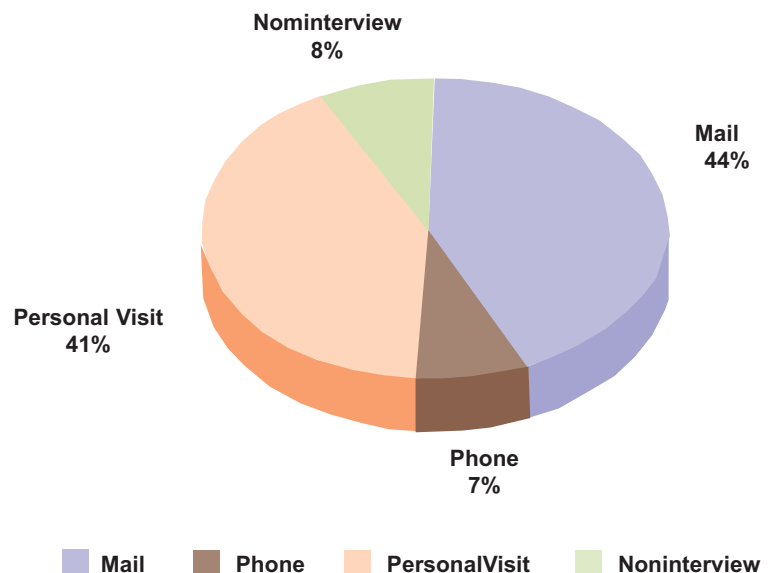
Source: US Census Bureau

the non-interview rate is higher for the District when compared to other states, the likely explanations include the busy lifestyles of DC residents, typical of city living.

Data obtained from the Census Bureau for 2005 show the distribution of interviews across the three collection modes: 44 percent mail response, 7 percent telephone interviews, 41 percent personal visits, and 8 percent non-interviewed (Figure 1).

AMERICAN COMMUNITY cont. on page 4

Figure 1: 2005 ACS Interviewing Results for the District of Columbia



Selected 2004 ACS Data

Table 3 presents some survey results of the 2004 ACS data produced by the US Census Bureau for the District of Columbia.

Additional data can be obtained from the US Census Bureau's site at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Table 3: Selected 2004 ACS Data for the District of Columbia

Demographic Characteristics	
Population	Percent
65 and over	12%
45 to 64	24%
25 to 44	36%
18 to 24	7%
Under 18	21%
Housing Characteristics	
Household Types	Percent
Married-couple families	22%
Other families	22%
People living alone	46%
Other nonfamily households	10%
Single-unit structures	40%
In multi-unit structures	60%
Housing Cost Burden	Percent
Owners with mortgage	34%
Owners without mortgage	14%
Renters	46%
Social Characteristics	
Educational Attainment	Percent
Graduate or professional degree	26%
Bachelor's degree	22%
Associate degree	2%
Some college, no degree	14%
High school diploma or equivalency	20%
Less than high school diploma	18%
Economic Characteristics	
Employment by Industry	Percent
Construction	3%
Manufacturing	1%
Wholesale trade	1%
Retail Trade	5%
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	4%
Information	5%
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	7%
Professional and business services	21%
Education, health, and social services	19%
Leisure and hospitality	8%
Public administration	17%
Other services	9%
Poverty Rates	Percent
People age 65 and over	14%
Related children under 18 years	34%
All families	17%
Female householder families	33%

For additional informationn contact:
D.C. Office of Planning
State Data Center
801 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 4000
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 442 7600
(202) 442-7638 FAX
www.planning.dc.gov

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey



Government of the District of Columbia