

## American Community Survey -- First Words

Most of the questions on the ACS (questions beyond the Short Form) have been asked in some way for more than 70 years. For example:

The question on occupation has been asked since 1850;

The Census first asked about disability status in 1830;

The question on whether you own or rent your home has been asked since 1890;

The question on housing type has been asked since 1940.

The ACS is an innovation which lessens the burden on the American public by collecting data from just a sample of about 2 percent of all households annually, instead of every person in the Census. For example, the 1910 Census asked 32 questions of 100 percent of households.

### KEY POINTS

1. The American Community Survey is the only source for up-to-date socio-economic information on a yearly basis—data which are invaluable to local decision makers, both public and private, and which used to be collected only every ten years.
2. Businesses use ACS information in many ways, such as site selection and marketing, which promotes job creation and economic recovery. For example,
  - a. *Educational attainment*: these data help companies evaluate potential workforce opportunities when scouting for locations to relocate, expand, or establish new sites, which in turn create jobs.
3. State and local governments use ACS information to support decision-making for key programs and services, such as schools, transportation, and emergency services.
  - a. *Age*: helps local school boards forecast education needs, including facilities, teachers, and education and workforce training programs.
  - b. *Travel to work*: helps local planners identify traffic concerns and build roads and transit systems to ease commutes.
  - c. *Median income, poverty, and female head of household*: used by cities for crime prevention and to track the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts.
4. Information from the ACS is used by federal agencies, the Congress and think tanks to assess federal government performance, providing measures of the impact and successes of programs on the communities they are trying to reach.
5. The ACS provides a way to test cost-saving innovations for the 2020 Census, such as questionnaire wording, data processing, and use of the Internet.