

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Census Tract?

Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical geographic subdivisions of a county or equivalent entity. They are uniquely numbered in each county with a numeric code. Census tracts generally have a population size between 1,200 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. They occasionally are split due to population growth or merged as a result of substantial population decline. A census tract usually covers a contiguous area; however, the spatial size of census tracts varies widely depending on the density of settlement.

Why is the 5-year Average American Community Survey (ACS) used?

The American Community Survey is a nationwide survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau to provide communities with demographic, social, economic, and housing data every year. For geographic areas with smaller populations such as census tracts, the ACS samples too few households to provide reliable single year estimates. The 5-year estimates includes data collected over a 60-month period that describe the average characteristics of an area over the 5-year period and has increased statistical reliability for less populated areas and small population subgroups.

How is Poverty Measured?

Poverty status is determined by comparing annual income to a set of dollar values (called poverty thresholds) that vary by family size, number of children, and the age of the householder. If a family's before-tax money income is less than the dollar value of their threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty. For people not living in families, poverty status is determined by comparing the individual's income to his or her poverty threshold. The poverty thresholds are updated annually to account for changes in the cost of living using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). In the American Community Survey, income is reported for the previous 12 months and the appropriate poverty threshold for each family is determined by multiplying the base-year poverty threshold from 1982 by the average of monthly CPI values for the 12 months prior to the survey month. Poverty thresholds do not vary geographically.

Poverty status is determined for all people except institutionalized people, people in military group quarters, people in college dormitories, and unrelated individuals under 15 years old. These groups are excluded from the numerator and denominator when calculating poverty rates.

What is Median Family Income?

Family income in the American Community Survey is the sum of the income of all family members 15 years and older living in the household. Families are groups of two or more people (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family. The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one-half of the families falling below the median income and one-half above the median.

Establishments

An establishment, as defined in the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Program, refers to an economic unit, such as a farm, mine, factory, or store that produces goods or provides services. It is typically at a single physical location address and engaged in one, or predominantly one type of economic activity for which a single industry classification may be applied. A firm, or a company, is a business and may consist of one or more establishments, where each establishment may participate in different predominant economic activity. The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Program includes only establishments that report to the Unemployment Insurance programs.