

### Finding and using census data in your investigations - tip sheet

Hey everyone! For those of you who were able to attend this session, thank you so much again for your time. For those who missed it, here's a tip sheet summarizing what we learned and best practices for starting to use census data in your stories and investigations.

Here is a [link to the original presentation](#).

### Main census data categories to use in reporting

- Decennial census - the main event!
  - Taken every 10 years
  - Tries to count every person living in the country — including undocumented residents
  - Limited number of questions on individuals, demographics & housing characteristics
- American Community Survey
  - Very comprehensive
  - Asks lots of questions of a “representative sample” of the country
  - ~3.5 million addresses a year
  - Not as comprehensive of a count — smaller geographies can be error-prone
- More than 130 other surveys, including...
  - American Housing Survey
  - American Time Use Survey
- Population Estimates & Projections
  - Attempts to guess what population will look like 10, 20, 30+ years from now
  - “Based on assumptions about future demographic trends”

### How to find the right data point / variable

People asked for a list of tables to use when looking for information. Here is a [cheat sheet](#) of tables handily compiled and organized by topic by the Census Reporter.

Here, for instance, is where the [grandparents tables are](#). Take a look at B1001 (from our scavenger hunt). And here are the [tables on citizenship](#), including country/region of birth.

### Best practices:

- Dive into [data.census.gov](#), even if it feels messy
  - You will learn by trial and error!
- Feeling intimidated? Start with [Census Reporter](#)
  - Staff can [help answer questions](#) and provide help/specific data, maps, tables
- Be careful you're selecting the right variables

- Median income or mean? Five-year survey or one year?
  - Again, the [table codes](#) provided by Census Reporter will be helpful here
- For beat reporters:
  - Create a list of questions you could answer using census data for future stories
- Be open with your readers about limitations
  - Large margins of error, undercounts, uncertainties
  - When in doubt about an issue, ask experts
  - Use your best judgment

### Story ideas

- Housing
  - What is your county's housing "vacancy rate?" What share of those homes are "seasonal vacancies," i.e. vacation homes? (Decennial census)
  - What share of homes in your city don't have air conditioning? How about heating? (American Housing Survey)
  - What is the homeowner-to-renter ratio for white, Black, Asian & Latino people in your county? (Decennial census)
  - What share of people in your metro area are not just homeless, but "housing insecure"? (American Housing Survey)
- Immigration
  - What share of residents in your county were born in [Eastern Europe](#)? How about South America? How do they feel about current international conflicts? How do these statistics square with official immigration rhetoric? (American Community Survey)
- Education
  - What share of adults in your area are college graduates? How does that change from one ZIP code to the next in your state? How does that correlate with voting rates and party preferences? (American Community Survey)
- Economic mobility
  - How has median household income changed in your county compared to the rest of your state and/or the U.S. over time? How do those changes reflect other changes to your county, i.e. job availability, housing market, etc.? (American Community Survey)