

Modernizing the Census Faster, More Efficient and More Relevant

The enormous challenge of accurately counting every man, woman and child in a country as large as the United States — a constitutional mandate — pushes the U.S. Census Bureau to constantly search for ways to improve the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the census. Ever since it helped usher in the computer age as the first client of the world's first commercially available computer, UNIVAC 1, the Census Bureau has been at the vanguard of modern information collection, processing and analysis.

The Census Bureau is launching some of the boldest and most significant changes in modern history to the way it does business. Together these changes should result in more timely and relevant information, better response rates and cost savings. They include:

1. Providing Current Data Every Year — In today's fast-paced world, 10 years is too long to wait for the demographic, housing and socio-economic information that decision-makers need to meet the changing needs of their communities. For government and business, costly decisions often are made on the basis of outdated data. The American Community Survey asks many of the same questions as the census long form that was sent to about one-in-six addresses in Census 2000. This survey is mailed monthly to a sample of addresses throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Eventually, it will produce up-to-date data every year for every state, city, county and census tract (neighborhood) in the country.

2. Streamlining the 2010 Census — The American Community Survey allows the Census Bureau to conduct the census using only a short form, which counts the population and some basic characteristics. This will permit more efficient data collection.

3. Automating Data Collection: GPS and Hand-Helds — Field workers for the 2010 Census will be entering data directly into the latest in hand-held computers, eliminating data entry errors that can result when paper notes are transcribed. They also will be using Global Positioning System software on the hand-held computers to ensure they are in the correct location and to update address records instantly in the field. The new technology will allow the Census Bureau to reduce the use of paper — resulting in considerable savings, quicker analysis and greater accuracy.

For more information, visit the American Community Survey Web page at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www> or the 2010 Census Web page at <http://www.census.gov/2010census/>.

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