

## 4. GEOGRAPHY AND THE ACS

Many journalists use American Community Survey (ACS) data to report on key trends in states, counties, and cities. But ACS data are available for many other geographic areas, including school districts, congressional districts, metropolitan areas, and “census designated places” (CDPs). A CDP is the U.S. Census Bureau’s term for a city, town, or village that lacks a separate municipal government but which otherwise physically resembles an incorporated place.

Journalists interested in smaller geographic areas may want to access ACS data for census tracts—small subdivisions of counties that typically have between 1,200 and 8,000 residents, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Census tract boundaries usually follow visible features but may follow governmental unit boundaries and other nonvisible features in some cases. There are also more than 300 ACS data tables available for block groups—subdivisions of census tracts—that include between 600 and 3,000 people each. In the ACS, block groups are the smallest level of geography published. Data for census tracts and block groups are only available in the ACS 5-year data products.

### **Public Use Microdata Areas**

Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are non-overlapping regions that partition a state and contain at least 100,000 people each. State Data Centers

### **What Geographic Areas Are Available?**

- ACS data are available for states, counties, cities, and a wide range of other geographic areas down to the block group level.
- Journalists interested in small geographic areas may want to explore ACS data for census tracts—small subdivisions of counties that typically have between 1,200 and 8,000 residents.
- Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are nonoverlapping regions that partition a state and contain at least 100,000 people each.
- One of the benefits of working with PUMAs is that, unlike counties, they all meet the population threshold that is needed to produce ACS 1-year estimates.

define PUMAs in partnership with regional, state, local, and tribal organizations and agencies so the boundaries reflect local knowledge about the regions.

The value of using PUMA geography becomes apparent when looking at a state such as Kentucky (see

