

April 23, 2015

Why We Ask

The American Community Survey (ACS) asks questions about our lives—how old we are, how much we earn, whether we work or go to school, how much we pay in rent or on a mortgage, whether we need assistance with daily routines, and more. These 72 questions provide an annual portrait of the nation and our communities that America can use to assess the past and plan the future. The ACS is our only source of detailed data about communities across the nation. When you fill out the survey, you are supplying information that will help fund school lunch programs, improve emergency services, build bridges, plan hospitals and schools, and inform businesses looking to add jobs or expand to new markets.

What we ask about...

How your responses help...



Employment

The ACS asks whether respondents are employed, unemployed, and out of the labor force. It also asks about weeks and hours worked and about industry and occupation.

This information helps government at all levels better understand unemployment and the availability of workers, plan unemployment programs and services, and develop programs to boost employment. Communities learn which occupations and industries are growing in their areas and businesses can find locations with the workforce they need.



Education

The ACS asks about school enrollment, gathering information on America's students from nursery school to graduate school and on whether they are in a private or public school. It also asks about educational attainment—did the respondent earn a high school diploma or the equivalent, a bachelor's degree, or higher?

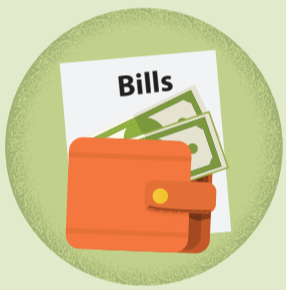
These statistics help communities to measure how well educational resources are serving their populations, measure changes in education over time, evaluate the educational attainment of the workforce, and identify the educational and training needs of adults. This information also helps communities to bridge gaps between the educational attainment of potential workers and the educational requirements of potential employers.



Veterans

The ACS asks about a person's military service, where veterans are moving throughout the country, their ages, and their VA service-connected disability rating status to understand veterans needs at the community level. Though the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains veterans' records, the ACS provides additional statistics about all veterans, regardless of whether they utilize VA services.

These statistics help communities plan for future health care and nursing homes. Statistics about whether veterans are in school and/or working help plan and fund job training, and statistics about veterans' homes help improve the home loan guarantee program.



Income and Housing Costs

The ACS asks several questions about the money you receive from various sources and your regular living expenses such as rents, mortgages, taxes, and utilities.

The statistics that result from these questions help gauge the need for economic and housing assistance. How many people live in poverty, what are their characteristics—the ACS is the only source of these data at the community level. Income and poverty estimates factor into funding requests that address need. When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs.



Commuting

The ACS asks about your daily commute—where you go, how you get there, what time you leave for work, and how long it takes—to understand where people are traveling during a normal day.

Precise information about your commuting patterns is crucial to planning improvements to roads and highways, developing transportation and services, and creating emergency response strategies.



Disability and Health Insurance

The ACS asks about a person's difficulty with specific daily living tasks: Do you have difficulty seeing or hearing? Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs or in dressing or bathing?

The ACS also asks whether people have health insurance, including type of health insurance for those who have health coverage plans.

Communities use these statistics to plan services such as transportation, employment programs, and public service accessibility for people with disabilities. Businesses that serve this population may also seek areas that have a high demand for their services.

From these statistics, we learn which groups are at risk of experiencing limited health care access, poor health, and poor health outcomes.



Housing Characteristics

The ACS asks questions about plumbing, kitchen facilities, and other housing features to help identify areas with substandard housing.

Questions about the size and age of housing also flag local problems like overcrowding, health hazards, and congestion.

Through your ACS responses, we learn about communities eligible for housing assistance, rehabilitation loans, and other programs that help people afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing.

Your responses help communities plan solutions. In places where disaster strikes, these data are vital in planning recovery.



Owners and Renters

The ACS asks about whether you own or rent your home, and the amount of monthly rent or how much the home and property are worth.

These statistics are used to analyze whether adequate housing is affordable for residents, protect owners and renters, and allocate and fund housing assistance programs. Governments use these statistics to understand changes in local housing markets, ensure residents have affordable housing options, qualify for assistance, and reduce the tax revenue losses from vacant or abandoned properties.



People and Relationships

The ACS asks respondents about their age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and their relationship to others in the household.

This information, along with other statistics such as income, occupation, and education is used to monitor well-being, discrimination, and economic hardship. State and local agencies use this information to plan and administer programs providing funds and services for groups such as single parents, low-income families, older people living alone, etc.

