

Why We Ask

Special Census Questions

Issued March 2003 Form SC-1.1

Seven basic questions are asked of every household in your community. The answers you provide are used by your local government to plan for and seek state and federal funding for schools, day care services, roads and public transportation, health care programs, services for the elderly, and other essential services. Examples are provided below. Information from individual household questionnaires is summarized into neighborhood and community-level data that your local government can use to plan for and seek funding for vital community needs. The individual information you provide is confidential and will not be released to anyone other than a sworn Census Bureau employee. All special census questions are in accordance with questions asked during the decennial census, as required by federal law (*United States Code, Title 13, Chapter 4, Section 196*).

NAME

Each person's name is asked in "roster" format to avoid missing or adding anyone incorrectly during data collection. "Name" is the only individual identifier asked on this form and is removed during the tabulation process. No one will ever be asked for other identifying information, such as social security number, checking account number, or other personal identifiers during this special census.

RELATIONSHIP

Relationship between household members provides a way to describe family and nonfamily households. Data are used to determine where new schools are needed, distribute housing funds, identify social service programs for seniors, and plan health care programs for families, children, and singles.

RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN

Race and Hispanic origin are asked of every person and are separate questions. Individuals of Hispanic origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Peruvian, could be of any race, such as White, Black, or American Indian. All persons should answer both the race and Hispanic origin questions regardless of race or ethnicity. These questions adhere to the Office of Management and Budget standards for reporting race and ethnicity, issued in October 1997.

Answers to both questions are used to plan, monitor, and fund programs that target certain populations. This information is used to identify segments of the population that may be in need of medical or educational services, or require voting materials in their own language. Race and Hispanic origin data also helps assess the fairness of employment practices and helps determine whether financial institutions are meeting the credit needs of minorities in low- and moderate-income areas.

GENDER

The sex question (male or female) is used to plan for and allocate funds for health care services, evaluate employment practices under the Civil Rights Act, identify community needs for food programs targeting low-income women with children, and distribute funds for adolescent family life projects.

AGE

Age data are used to allocate funds for school programs, health services, and equal employment opportunities. Age is also used to identify locations needing new schools and to forecast the number of people eligible for social security and medicare benefits.

Age is asked in a two-part question: the first part asks for the age of the person, and the second part asks for the date of birth. Since one person in each household usually fills out the census questionnaire for all household members, sometimes ages are reported incorrectly or left blank. This two-part format improves the accuracy of those answers.

OWN OR RENT

Whether one owns or rents is one of the most basic ways to describe the housing inventory. Homeownership rates serve as an indicator of the nation's economic health. Local planners assess neighborhood stability based on owner-occupancy rates. The Federal Highway Administration allocates funds for transportation programs targeting the elderly and disabled based, in part, on the proportion of people living in rental properties, because renters are more likely to use public transportation than those who own their home.