

About the American Community Survey (ACS)

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the most extensive nationwide survey currently available. From its annual releases we are able to examine the city's detailed demographic, socioeconomic, and housing characteristics. Each month, questionnaires are sent to a sample of approximately 295,000 addresses across the country, so households are continuously receiving and responding to the ACS. In order to have a large enough sample from which to create estimates of characteristics, the ACS "rolls-up" the sample for 12-, 36-, or 60-month periods, depending on the size of the geographic area. Estimates are prepared using 1 year of sample for places of at least 65,000 residents, 3 years of sample for places of at least 20,000 residents, and 5 years of sample for all places regardless of size. This means that estimates can be obtained for a single year (e.g. 2013) or for multi-year periods (e.g. 2011-2013 or 2009-2013).

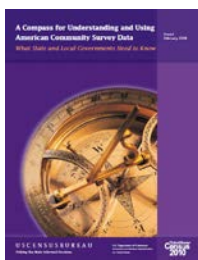
Mid-level Geographies

Since New York City's 55 Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs, which are approximations of New York City's 59 Community Districts based on the aggregation of whole census tracts) all exceed the 65,000 threshold, estimates based on a single year are available. However, many cells in the Census Bureau's PUMA tables and data profiles have been suppressed because of confidentiality concerns and the absence of sufficient sample for reliable estimates. PUMA estimates, however, are also available based on 3- and 5-year periods. While these numbers represent a broader time period, the increased statistical reliability makes it well worth the loss of temporal precision. Therefore, PUMA estimates for only three- or five-year periods are posted on the Population Division website. (Multiyear estimates also are posted for the city and boroughs, to allow for comparisons with the PUMA estimates).

Small-area Geographies

For small area data, below the PUMA-level, ACS five-year period estimates for Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) have been posted, beginning with 2006-2010. NTAs are aggregations of census tracts and are subsets of New York City's 55 PUMAs. Primarily due to these constraints, NTA boundaries and their associated names may not definitively represent neighborhood boundaries. ACS data are also available at the census tract and block group levels. However, the estimates for these geographies are, by and large, statistically unreliable and are unsuitable for most planning purposes. Consequently, users are encouraged to rely on NTAs as the smallest geographic unit of analysis when employing ACS data.

Guidance on Application of American Community Survey (ACS) Data



For information on the applications of American Community Survey data, including the use of thresholds for determining reliability, see [A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What State and Local Governments Need to Know](#).