

Dissemination of Statistical Information Products to the Public

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Census Bureau Principle

Authored for:

Census Bureau Methodology & Standards Council
Cynthia Z.F. Clark, Chair

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Document Management & Control ¹

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1.0	06 Aug 02	M&S Council	Initial Release
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¹ **The most current version of this document is maintained on the Census Bureau Intranet and may be accessed from the [Quality Management Repository](#).**

Census Bureau Principle: Dissemination of Statistical Information Products to the Public

Introduction

The principal functions of the Census Bureau include the collection, compilation, analysis, and the dissemination of information. The Census Bureau seeks to maintain its independence in the production of statistics; to preserve the confidentiality of information provided by respondents; and to maintain high quality standards for the information it disseminates to the public. These features foster credibility among data users and trust among data providers. High quality publicly available statistics on the people and economy of the United States produced by the Census Bureau are essential for the nation to advance its economic well-being and the quality of life of its people.

The Census Bureau's quality principles depict its broad, underlying policies, and its approaches and direction to quality. This document discusses the Census Bureau's principles for assuring high quality in the statistical information products it disseminates to the public. All such products are judged to be accurate, timely, relevant, accessible to data users, and reproducible. These principles and the review required to ensure that the principles are followed are explained below.

Scope

These Principles apply to all statistical information products disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau.

Principles

1. Statistical information products disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau must be accompanied with a statement describing their accuracy. Accuracy is the degree of closeness to the targeted value, using statistical measures of error. Data derived from samples will be published with their coefficients of variation. Measures of nonsampling error are provided to the degree they are available.
2. Statistical information products disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau will be produced in a timely manner. Timeliness encompasses frequency of data dissemination, as well as the closeness of the release to the data's reference period. Efforts will be made to collect and publish data in a time interval that allows high quality data to be disseminated to the public and also ensures that the information is useful.
3. Information collected by the Census Bureau will be designed to provide statistical measures that are relevant. Relevance is the degree to which the information products provide useful information for both current needs and anticipated future needs. The

Census Bureau will maintain ongoing contact with a broad spectrum of users to ensure that its information will continue to remain relevant.

4. Statistical information products will be disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau in a manner that allows them to be accessible to a broad range of data users with different requirements for data availability and understandability. Accessibility is the ease of access or effort needed for customers to acquire statistical data, products, or services. The Census Bureau will conduct extensive usability tests to ensure that its statistical products are accessible and understandable to its data users.
5. Census Bureau disclosure avoidance protection protocols will be followed.
6. Statistical information products disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau must be reproducible following prescribed methodology. Reproducibility means that there is the capability to use the documented methods on the same data set to achieve a consistent result. Documentation provided by the Census Bureau must allow results to be repeated. However, data released by the Census Bureau generally will not directly be reproducible by the public because the underlying data sets used to produce them are confidential. In addition, some results may not be easily reproduced by third parties due to the complexity and detail of the methods and data.
7. Exemption from the requirements of these Principles may be sought in special circumstances using the procedure described below under “**Responsibilities.**”

Review Required for the Dissemination of Data Products to the Public

All statistical information products disseminated to the public by the Census Bureau undergo an extensive review that encompasses the content, statistical and survey methodology, and policy implications of the document. This review ensures that the data and text of the document meet Census Bureau standards for quality as defined in the Census Bureau’s quality principles and quality standards documents approved by the Methodology and Standards Council.

1. If a potential product is determined by the Census Bureau as unfit for use because it does not meet Census Bureau requirements for quality, the Census Bureau reserves the right to withhold the data product from dissemination to the public. Whether statistical information products are fit for use will depend on the intended uses and on their fundamental characteristics of quality as defined in the Census Bureau’s quality principles and quality standards, as well as on the expectations of users for what is acceptable for these characteristics of quality. The range of quality issues underlying fitness for use that must be addressed includes relevance, accuracy, timeliness, interpretability, and coherence.

2. Challenges concerning whether a Census Bureau statistical information product adheres to Census Bureau standards will be reviewed by the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau will make a determination of whether a correction is warranted.

Responsibilities

Program areas will be responsible for the following:

- Ensuring that statistical information products disseminated to the public meet quality standards;
- Advising the Methodology and Standards Council when statistical information products may be unfit for use; and
- Receiving and reviewing external challenges about a statistical product's adherence to quality standards.

The Methodology and Standards Council will be responsible for the following:

- Providing standards and guidelines on the application of these Principles to program areas;
- Assisting program areas in the development and usage of these Principles;
- Initiating evaluations, reviews and updates to these Principles as necessary;
- Reviewing the designation "unfit for use" when proposed by the program area; and
- Establishing an appeal panel consisting of the program associate directors if initial program area assessments are unacceptable to the challenger.

Inquiries

Inquiries relating to the interpretation of these Principles should be addressed to the Census Bureau Methodology and Standards Council.

Recommended by the Census Bureau Methodology and Standards Council:

Cynthia Z.F. Clark

Signed August 06, 2002

Cynthia Z.F. Clark
Associate Director for Methodology and Standards
Chair, Methodology and Standards Council

Date

Robert N. Tinari

Signed August 06, 2002

Robert Tinari
Chief, Computer Assisted Survey Research Office

Date

David Whitford

Signed August 06, 2002

David C. Whitford
Acting Chief, Decennial Statistical Studies Division

Date

Al R. Tupek

Signed August 06, 2002

Alan Tupek
Chief, Demographic Statistical Methods Division

Date

Howard Hogan

Signed August 06, 2002

Howard Hogan
Chief, Economic Statistical Methods and Programming Division

Date

Ruth Ann Killion

Signed August 06, 2002

Ruth Ann Killion
Chief, Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division

Date

Tommy Wright

Signed August 06, 2002

Tommy Wright
Chief, Statistical Research Division

Date

Concurrence:*Preston Jay Waite**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Preston Jay Waite
 Associate Director for Decennial Programs

 Date
*Nancy M. Gordon**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Nancy M. Gordon
 Associate Director for Demographic Programs

 Date
*Frederick T. Knickerbocker**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Frederick T. Knickerbocker
 Associate Director for Economic Programs

 Date
*Marvin D. Raines**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Marvin D. Raines
 Associate Director for Field Operations

 Date
*Gloria Gutierrez**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Gloria Gutierrez
 Assistant Director for Marketing and Customer Liaison

 Date
*Cynthia Z. F. Clark**Signed June 11, 2003*

 Cynthia Z. F. Clark
 Associate Director for Methodology and Standards

 Date