

Frequently Asked Questions

Administrative Records Data Acquisitions

1. What are administrative records and third party data?

Administrative records and third party data refer to micro data records contained in files collected and maintained by administrative (i.e., program) agencies and commercial entities. Government and commercial entities maintain these files for the purpose of administering programs and providing services. Administrative records are distinct from systems of information collected exclusively for statistical purposes, such as those the U.S. Census Bureau produces under the authority of Title 13 of the United States Code (U.S.C.). The Census Bureau uses, and seeks to use, administrative records developed by federal agencies, tribal, state, and local governments as well as data from commercial entities.

2. What are the components of the 2020 Census Research and Testing Program and how does the use of administrative records fit into the overall plan?

The Census Bureau is currently researching and testing four key design areas related to the 2020 Census:

1. *Reengineering Address Canvassing*: The Census Bureau verifies the address and physical location of each living quarter in the United States prior to every census, a process called “Address Canvassing.” The Census Bureau is testing ways to eliminate the need to verify every address in person.
2. *Optimizing Self-Response*: The Census Bureau is testing several strategies to increase the number of households that respond to the Census on their own without the need for additional reminders or a visit from a census taker. Achieving increased self-response would significantly reduce overall Census costs.
3. *Using Administrative Records*: Census takers spend significant time and effort asking households to provide some of the same information that they have already provided to other government agencies. The Census Bureau is exploring ways we might use these “administrative records” data to reduce the burden on respondents, to validate Census’ mapping databases, and to lower the cost of the Census. Much of Census’ work is focused on evaluating the quality and accuracy of the data. Administrative data sources include tribal, federal, state and local governments, and third-party data from commercial entities.
4. *Reengineering Field Operations*: Census is looking at how to adapt some of the best practices used by corporate America to significantly improve how we structure and manage our massive field operations.

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3. Is the Census Bureau authorized to acquire administrative records? If so, what are the legal provisions?

Various laws authorize the Census Bureau to receive administrative records. The Census Bureau is authorized to acquire or purchase records from states and third party entities under Title 13, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 6. The Privacy Act of 1974 explicitly permits federal agencies to disclose personally identifiable information to the Census Bureau if for statistical uses under Title 13, United States Code. Additionally, the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) and other federal confidentially statutes permit agencies to share data with the Census Bureau under strict, secure conditions. State laws often mirror these federal statutes.

4. How does the Census Bureau protect administrative records and third party data from unauthorized access?

Stringent legal authorities protect all administrative records and third party data collected by the Census Bureau. All data collected by Census is confidential under 13 U.S.C. §9. The statute only allows the Census Bureau to use the data for statistical purposes and prohibits the disclosure or publication of data that personally identifies an individual or business. The Privacy Act of 1974 prohibits the disclosure of personal information maintained by an agency without the written consent of the individual.

In addition, our security measures ensure that only a restricted number of authorized people have access to confidential information. Access is granted to conduct our work and for no other purposes. Every person who works with confidential information collected by the Census Bureau is sworn for life to uphold the law. Violating 13 U.S.C. §9 is a federal crime with serious penalties, including a federal prison sentence of up to five years, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both.

5. Why must the Census Bureau secure agreements from each state to transfer administrative records for federal programs?

Federal agencies do not own state data records needed by the Census Bureau. Therefore, an official agreement must be in place in order to transfer administrative records data for federal programs. Since federal agencies are not the owners of this data, these federal program administrators do not have the authority to agree to, or enforce data sharing at the state level.

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6. Could a state's decision not to share its administrative records data potentially affect its 2020 Census data, population estimates and/or American Community Survey results?

At this time, the Census Bureau does not know the impact on states electing not to share their administrative records. That is why the Census Bureau is conducting research and testing of the use of various administrative and third-party data sources. The Census Bureau plans to conclude its research and testing by 2019.

7. Will the use of administrative records collected for the 2020 Census be limited to the 2020 Census or is there an expectation of expanding it to other Census Bureau-related surveys?

Whether the Census Bureau would use these records beyond the 2020 Census would depend on the terms of the agreements reached with the entity that owns the record. A majority of the current data use agreements between the Census Bureau and various entities support research on behalf of a multitude of Census Bureau-related survey programs.

8. Can states be reimbursed for the cost of extracting these administrative records data files for Census Bureau use?

Yes, under 13 U.S.C. §6, the Census Bureau is authorized to purchase information from states for conducting censuses and surveys. Census offers to pay all states for sharing their *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)* and *Women, Infants and Children (WIC)* administrative records data to help defray the costs of supplying the data. The state program administrators ultimately decide whether to accept payment.

9. How long does the Census Bureau keep the original administrative records? What legal and technical steps occur for the destruction of the files after the Census can no longer needs them?

Most records received and maintained in original form by the Census Bureau are destroyed two years after receipt, unless states establish a different timetable through a data sharing agreement. Files created by the Census Bureau in the course of using the original administrative records also are destroyed within two years or when no longer required to meet programmatic needs. The Census Bureau retains administrative records in accordance with the applicable records retention schedule.

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10. Is the Census Bureau pursuing administrative records data from tribal governments in support of the 2020 Census?

The Census Bureau is in the initial phases of tribal government outreach in support of *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)* and *Women, Infants and Children (WIC)* administrative records data sharing agreements.

11. What administrative records outreach has the Census Bureau conducted with key oversight and constituency groups in support of the 2020 Census?

As part of the 2020 Census research and testing efforts, the 2020 Census Research and Planning Office has engaged and continues to engage the following groups:

- The Office of the Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office have conducted audits and reviews of our work and have provided recommendations that can help shape process and operations.
- Advisory groups, such as the National Academy of Sciences, the Census Scientific Advisory Committee and the National Advisory Committee contribute to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs. Members of key constituency groups are part of these committees.
- The 2020 Census Research and Planning Office conducts quarterly 2020 Census Program Management Reviews for internal and external stakeholders.

The Census Bureau routinely engages with external stakeholders who provide valuable guidance on Census surveys and programs.