

*Results from the 2015  
Data Products Survey  
for the American Community Survey*



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## Executive Summary

In the spring of 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted an online survey for American Community Survey (ACS) data users. The survey consisted of nine questions, including seven core questions about the data products, documentation, and current dissemination methods. Questions on organizational affiliation and a request for contact information for possible follow-up activities followed. Four of the seven core questions allowed users to provide additional comments, explaining their answers in detail.

There were 667 responses to the survey. Two responses were not usable for analysis, but the remaining 665 provided a rich source of user feedback about the content of the data products, the accompanying documentation, and the current dissemination methods.

There were 824 comments from the open-ended questions, which provided a deeper understanding of the responses to the multiple-choice components. Most of this report summarizes what the Census Bureau learned from these comments.

### Highlights from the survey results

Respondents were very positive about certain aspects of their experience finding and using the ACS data products. For example, about 87% of the respondents rated the content of the data products to be “good” or “excellent,” and 64% of the respondents said that the ACS data products are meeting their needs “very well.” However, comments from the open-ended questions were critical about methods of disseminating the data, data content, and documentation. The following list covers some of the major concerns expressed in these comments.

- Dissatisfaction with current methods of accessing the ACS data, including time required to find both data and documentation, and difficulties in downloading and manipulating tables.
- Need for support with user-defined tables and geographic areas, including a specific need for the Microdata Analysis System (MAS).
- Need for more detail in product content.
- Concerns about large margins of error (MOEs) for small geographic areas.
- Complaints about the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), including documentation and finding the data.
- Complaints about cancelling the 3-year products.
- Need for geographic mapping capability and Geographic Information System (GIS) support.
- Many comments about ACS documentation, both negative and positive, including specific suggestions for improvements.

There is overlap among several of these themes. For example, respondents who wanted more flexibility in creating the data products they need are similar to those who want more detail in the data products.

Many of the open-ended comments touched on issues related to the current methods of accessing ACS data and tools. In fact, over 40% of the comments included complaints about some aspect of this access.

In addition, two observations about the responses to questions Q8 (organizational affiliation) and Q9 (request for contact information for later follow-up) follow:

- Fifty-four percent of the respondents provided contact information for further follow-up by the Census Bureau.
  - Overall, these respondents appear to have a more favorable view of the ACS, while providing many comments and suggestions at the same time.
- Ninety-nine percent of the respondents provided some type of answer to Q8, regarding organizational affiliation.

## Recommendations for follow-up actions

We have identified four follow-up activities for the Census Bureau:

- Share the results of survey with the following groups:
  - ACS Data Product Redesign Workgroup – comments on issues with data products
  - Center for Enterprise Dissemination Services and Consumer Innovation (CEDSCI) leadership group – comments on issues related to dissemination
  - ACS Content Council – requests for content changes to the current questionnaire
  - ACS Variance Estimation and Statistical Support Branch – comments on MOEs and other issues related to statistical reliability
  - ACS stakeholders external to the Census Bureau.
- Identify any changes to data products, documentation, or dissemination channels that should be considered based on the survey results.
- Engage those respondents who left their contact information to join a feedback group that will provide comments on new data products and dissemination strategies.
- Consider additional methods of procuring user feedback based on lessons learned from this survey, e.g., a series of focus groups with small groups of data users that discuss concerns and ideas in greater depth.

## 1.0 Overview

### 1.1 Why the survey was conducted

The Census Bureau wanted to solicit feedback from ACS data users on their experiences accessing and using ACS data products, ACS documentation, and the Census Bureau data tools. The proposal to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for the survey listed three specific substantive issues that the survey would examine:

1. User feedback on the content of the ACS data products and usage of geographic areas.
2. User feedback on ACS documentation.
3. User feedback on the dissemination systems or ease of access.

### 1.2 How the survey was implemented

The survey was an online survey, and OMB approval was required in advance (OMB #0607-0760). We solicited respondents in two ways:

1. Using an ACS user email list of almost 30,000 email addresses to notify users in advance.
2. Advertising on the ACS website allowing anyone to respond.

In an effort to minimize respondent burden, there was no requirement to answer any specific question or any specific number of questions. The respondent was only required to answer at least one of the first seven questions before submitting the completed survey. We added measures to prevent multiple responses submitted from the same source (IP address). The survey was open for responses from April 13 until June 1, 2015.

### 1.3 Basic facts about the survey responses

The survey has nine questions with seven core questions for which the average non-response rate is 3%. Four of the questions allowed users to provide write-in responses. Table 1 below gives a quick view of some basic facts about the survey results.

Table 1: Basic results of the ACS Data Products Survey

Basic facts	Total	Percent
Usable responses	665	2.25%*
Respondents answered one or more open-ended questions	446	68%**
Total number of open-ended responses	824	N/A
Respondents provided contact information	357	54%**
Respondents responded to Q8 on organizational affiliation	658	99%**

\* As percent of all invited to respond (estimated)

\*\* As percent of all respondents

## 2.0 Methodology for analysis

### 2.1 Basic statistics on responses to close-ended questions

Appendix 1. 2015 ACS Data Products Survey questionnaire) shows the actual questions in the survey. This report often refers to each question using an ID (e.g., Q1, Q2 or Q9) without giving the full text of the question. We conducted the analysis by close-ended or open-ended questions. Table 2 below indicates which close-ended question also contained an open-ended option.

Table 2: List of close-ended and open-ended survey questions

ID	Question Text	Close-ended	Open-ended
Q1	Overall experience in finding data, data content, documentation and customer service	Yes	No
Q2	ACS data products meeting user needs	Yes	Yes
Q3	ACS data products useful but not available	Yes	Yes
Q4	Geographic areas most important to user	Yes	No
Q5	Custom geographies and building block	Yes	No
Q6	Use of documentation and suggestion for improvement	Yes	Yes
Q7	Suggestion to improve dissemination	Yes	Yes
Q8	Organizational affiliation of user	Yes	No
Q9	Contact information solicited by the Census Bureau	Yes	No

The first seven questions are considered “core questions,” since they deal directly with the user experiences with the ACS data. Four of these core questions have open-ended parts that appear if the respondent answers the question in a certain way:

For example, if the respondent answered question Q2 by checking either “Not at all” or “Somewhat,” he or she could provide further information in a text box given.

We first computed the basic frequency distributions of responses to each close-ended question, and [Section 3.1](#) shows the result. After this step, we started to examine the open-ended questions. Additionally, we identified four respondent subgroups and conducted further analysis of each of these subgroups.

Overall, non-response was not a major issue and detailed summary is available in Appendix 4. (Non-response rates for the survey questions).

## 2.2 Analyzing the geography questions

Survey questions Q4 and Q5 (see Appendix 1. 2015 ACS Data Products Survey questionnaire) dealt with geography. Both questions allowed the respondents to “check all that apply.” Therefore, we tallied the total number of responses for each type of geography for each question. [Section 3.2](#) provides the results and commentary for Q4 and Q5.

## 2.3 Analyzing responses to organizational affiliation

There was a very high response rate to the question on organizational affiliation, Q8 (only seven non-responses out of 665 respondents). Although 612 respondents checked only one organizational affiliation, including “Other,” forty-six checked more than one. We wanted to determine if there was any association between the type of organization and the nature of the responses to the other questions. To do this analysis, we needed to assign each of these 46 respondents to a single organizational affiliation. For each of these respondents, we chose a single organizational affiliation from the list they provided using a simple random selection procedure. We were then able to analyze the responses to the core questions for each organizational affiliation. Detailed results are available in Appendix 3. (Responses to the seven core questions by organizational affiliation).

## 2.4 Analyzing responses to the open-ended questions



### 2.4.1 Methods used to analyze responses to open-ended questions

There were a large number of responses to open-ended questions, and many of these responses were long and covered more than one issue. This made the analysis of these responses quite challenging. We looked into using software applications to automate or aid in analyzing them. An initial search for any such software in use at the Census Bureau did not yield any results. We tried out a few open source packages for coding and text mining, but did not have the time to pursue them further.

It was very important to us that two people could follow a scheme and reliably code a response the same way. We also agreed to code all open-ended responses without regard to answers the respondents gave to other questions. We decided on the following sequence to assign codes.

1. Use two reviewers/coders.
2. Identify keywords/codes to assign to comments – this required several iterations of initial coding to arrive at the scheme of codes to use.
3. Code the same comments independently by two reviewers to validate the keywords/codes, compare the results and resolve the differences.
4. Review independently to check coding made by the other coder for all responses to the open-ended questions.

Once we completed this process, we arrived at 12 representative codes, and then coded all open-ended responses using this coding scheme. Table 3 below shows the codes and definitions, and the coding results are available in [Section 3.3](#).

Table 3: Codes and definitions used to classify responses to open-ended questions

Code	Definition
Anti_ACS	Strong language against ACS, including preference for old long form data
Change over time	Comments on comparing estimates across time periods, finding out how products have changed from one period to the next, etc.
Content	Proposed new questions and complaints about missing content that is needed, etc.
Compare to Decennial Census	Comments about making such a comparison, knowing what can and cannot be compared
Customer service	Complaints about lack of Census Bureau responsiveness to inquiries and data products related issues

Code	Definition
Dissemination	Comments on any usability issues, including American FactFinder(AFF), searching, or manipulating data on a dissemination platform, issues related to downloading data, and support for direct queries of the internal microdata (e.g., MAS), which are under the purview of Center for Enterprise Dissemination Services and Consumer Innovation (CEDSCI) of the Census Bureau.
Documentation	Comments about existing documentation, finding answer to a question in the documentation, and not being aware of documentation, etc.
Geography	Comments about not being able to get characteristics needed a geography level (especially block group), proposing a new type of geography or restoring a geography Summary Level (080) that was eliminated, and needs related to building custom geography
Out of scope	Requesting something that is impossible for the ACS to cover; e.g., historical data before the ACS began
Product content	Comments related to current ACS data product content/ product line, population thresholds for 1-year and 3-year products, and eliminating 3-year estimates, etc.
Sample size	Comments on margin of errors (MOEs), unreliable estimates, especially for small areas, and data quality concerns, etc.
Timeliness	Complaints about lag time too great for data to be of use for a local geographic area

#### 2.4.2 Exploratory analysis to discover common themes and respondent subgroups

Based on the results from coding the open-ended questions, we looked at the responses to the close-ended questions for those respondents whose comments coded to dissemination, the most common code for all open-ended responses. We then looked at the subgroup that did not provide responses to any of the four open-ended questions. We also contrasted the responses to open-ended questions for those who provided contact information (Q9) vs. those who did not, and found interesting differences. Finally, we looked at responses to close-ended questions based on the organizational category assigned to each respondent. Here too, we found results that warranted more in-depth analysis of close-ended questions by organizational category.

Question Q1 asks respondents to rate their experience using ACS data in four different categories. We concentrated on all four categories of question Q1 for these four

subgroups of respondents:

1. Respondents who did not provide comments to any of the open-ended questions.
2. Respondents who provided comments to one or more open-ended questions and those comments were coded to dissemination.
3. Respondents who provided contact information (question Q9).
4. Respondents from each major organizational affiliation category (question Q8).

## 3.0 Findings

### 3.1 Basic results

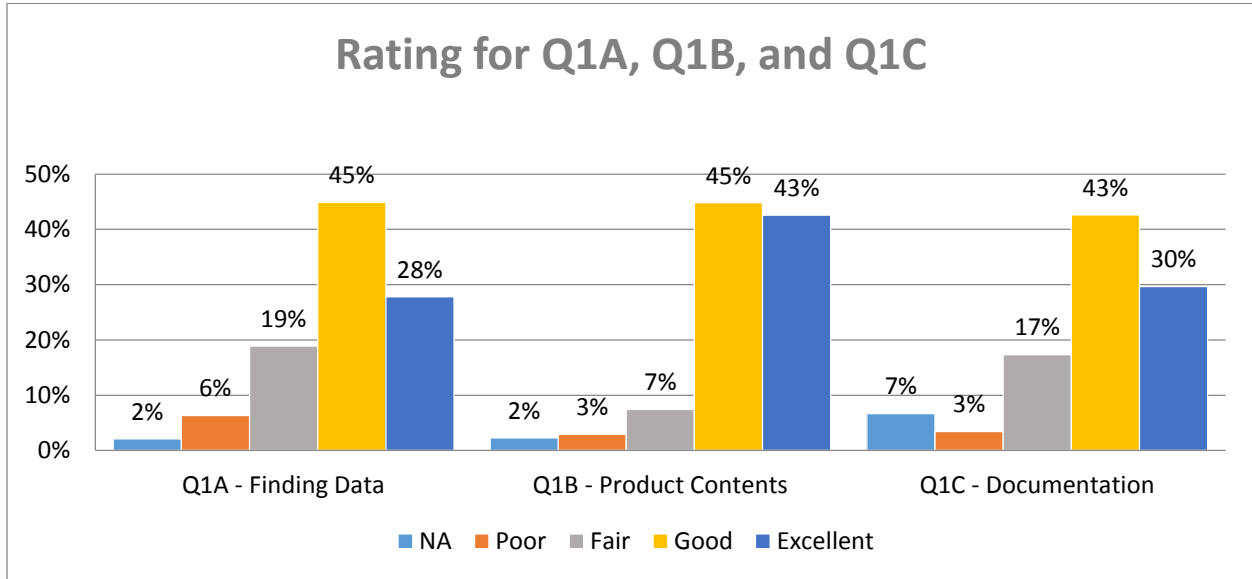
#### 3.1.1 Results for question Q1

Question Q1 asks respondents to rate their overall experience in four areas.

Q1: Please rate your overall experience using ACS data products in the following categories: Finding Data (Q1A), Data Content (Q1B), Documentation (Q1C), and Customer Service (Q1D).

Figure 1 below shows the results for the first three parts (Q1A, Q1B and Q1C) of the four-part question Q1.

Figure 1: Rating for finding data (Q1A), data product contents (Q1B) and documentation (Q1C)



Notes about Figure 1:

- The sum of the “Good” and the “Excellent” responses for Q1A, Q1B, and Q1C are all well over 70%, indicating overall satisfaction with finding data, product contents, and documentation.

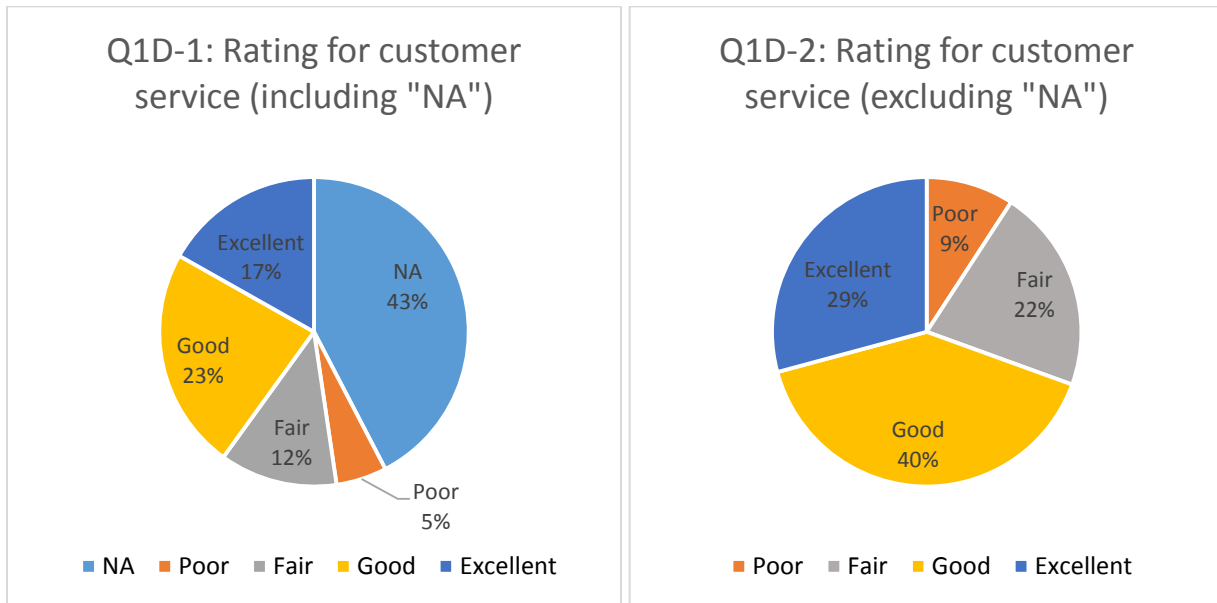
Figures 2 and 3 below show the results for part 4 (Q1D) of question Q1. We included two pie charts to illustrate the results due to the high percentage of responses to category “NA” for this particular question. Respondents who answered “NA” for customer service indicated that they had no experience with the customer service provided by the Census Bureau. There are two possible explanations for the “NA” response:

- Respondents were not aware of the availability of customer service.
- Respondents were aware of the service but had no need to use it.

For those reasons, we use Figure 2 for the rating of customer service including “NA,” while Figure 3 shows the rating without “NA.”

Figure 2: Rating for customer service (Q1D-1)

Figure 3: Rating for customer service (Q1D-2)



Notes about Figure 2 and Figure 3:

- Figure 2 shows that 43% of the respondents answered “NA” for customer service, indicating that they had no experience with Census Bureau customer service.
- Figure 3 demonstrates a high rate of satisfaction with customer service if we factor out the "NA." About 69% of the respondents who had experience rated the service “Excellent” and “Good.”

3.1.2 Results for Questions Q2, Q3, Q6, and Q7

Figure 4 shows the results from question Q2 and Figure 5 shows the results from questions Q3, Q6 and Q7. See below for survey questions.

Q2: How well do the ACS data products meet your needs?

Q3: Are there any data products that would be useful to you but are not available?

Q6: Have you ever used or tried to use any of the documentation provided on the ACS website at [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)?

Q7: Do you have any suggestions for better ways we can disseminate ACS data products?

Figure 4: Responses to products meeting needs (Q2)

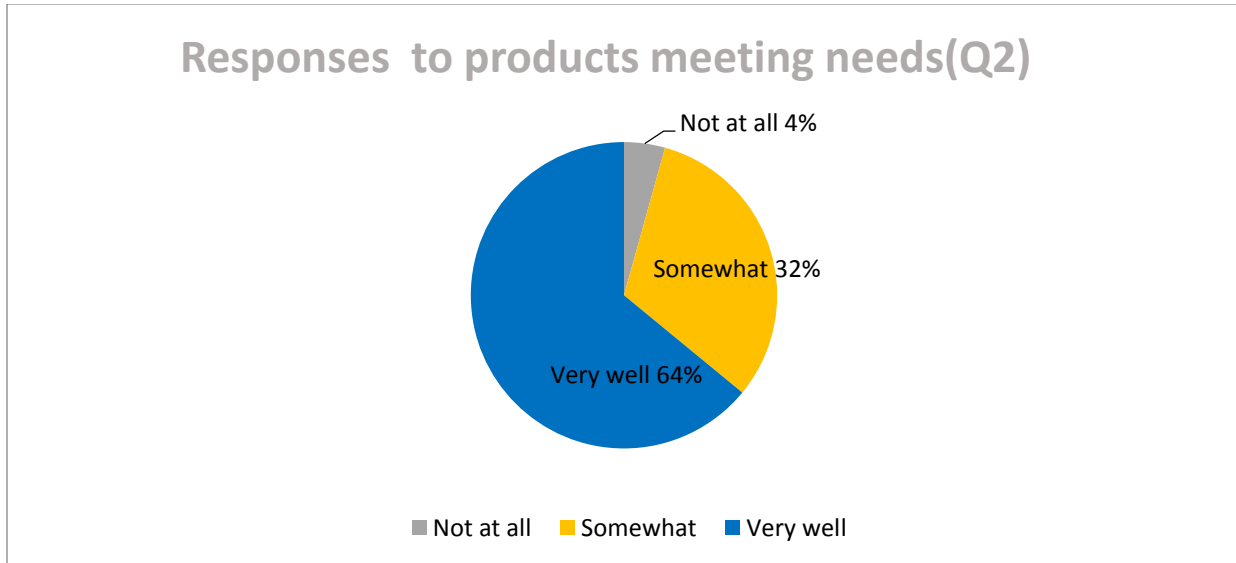
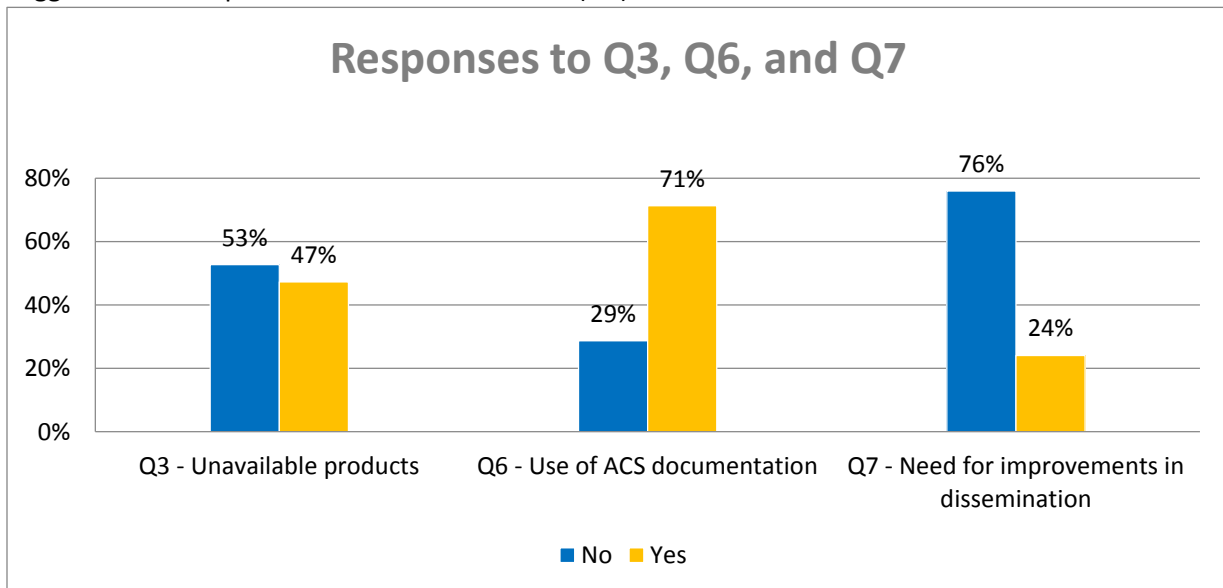


Figure 5: Responses to useful data products not available (Q3), used ACS documentation (Q6) and suggestions for improvements in dissemination (Q7)



Notes about the responses to question Q2, Q3, Q6 and Q7:

- These are the four questions with an open-ended component available if the respondent answers the question in a certain way. For Q2, we ask the user to add any comments if the answer is “Not at all” or “Somewhat,” for Q3, Q6, and Q7, we ask the respondent to supply additional comments if the answer is “Yes.”
- Not all respondents with the opportunity to comment further on these questions actually did so and Table 4 below illustrates the distribution.

Table 4: Percent responded for Q2, Q3, Q6 and Q7.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Respondents who commented as a percent of those who could comment</b>
Q2	84.1%
Q3	92.9%
Q6	43.7%
Q7	96.2%

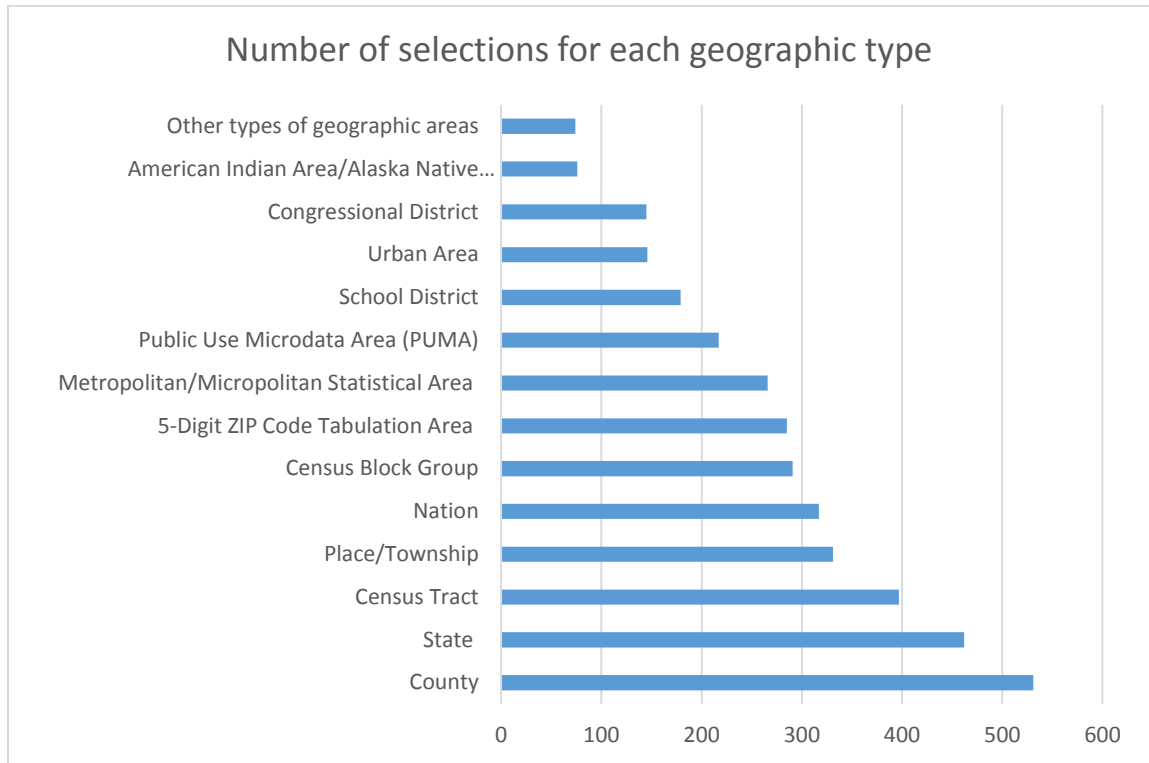
The difference in the percentage for Q6 compared with the other three questions is striking. This could be due to the format of Q6. The close-ended part of the question only asks if the respondent has ever used the ACS online documentation. If the respondent answers “Yes,” that does not necessarily mean that the respondent has any suggestion to improve the documentation. On the other hand, each of the questions Q2, Q3, and Q7, only solicits comments from the respondent if he or she has indicated some dissatisfaction with the topic addressed by the question. For example, Q3 asks if the respondent can think of useful products that are not currently available. If the respondent answers “Yes,” he or she is likely to comment.

### 3.2 Results of geography questions Q4 and Q5

Figure 6 shows the results of Q4. See below for survey question.

Q4: Which geographic areas are important to you when using ACS data products?

Figure 6: Responses to geography used (Q4)



Notes about Figure 6:

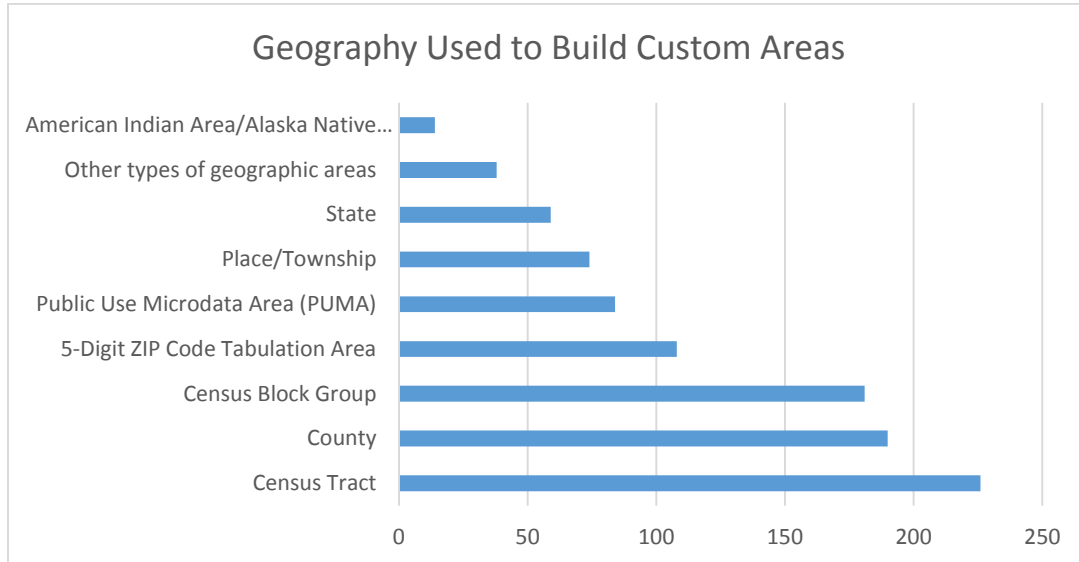
- “County” ranks as the most important geography, while “State” and “Census Tract” rank second and third respectively. Since much emphasis is placed on getting local area estimates from ACS users., it is somewhat surprising that “Nation” ranks fifth in the number of responses to Q4, putting it ahead of many geographic types, such as zip code and metro area.

Figure 7 shows the results of Q5. See below for survey question.

Q5: Do you create custom geographies by combining geographic areas to make your estimates? If “Yes”, chose all apply.



Figure 7: Responses to geography used to build custom areas (Q5)



Notes about Figure 7:

- “Census tract” is the most frequently selected geographic type for question Q5. This is not surprising, since tracts allow for great flexibility in creating custom geographic areas. There are many more estimates available at the tract level compared with the block group level.

3.3 Analysis of open-ended questions

We identified 12 themes/keywords (see Table 3 in [Section 2.4.1](#)) to use when coding responses to open-ended questions, and then categorized those comments into the themes. Some of respondent comments to a particular survey question may fit into more than one theme. Table 5 below gives the summary of the user comments related to each theme.

Table 5: Summary of the respondent comments by codes for open-ended questions

<b>Code</b> (number of comments)	<b>Concerns and issues from respondent comments</b>
Anti_ACS (8)	Less data available than from past decennial Long Form products; ACS is too intrusive/waste of money; Cannot support the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data needs
Change over time (12)	Need for ACS time series /longitudinal data; Better historical data availability; Need tools to help users create time series data and maps; Consistent geographies over time
Content (14)	Request changes in ACS questionnaire. Examples include: Add a question on parent's place of birth; Better distinction between Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid in questions on healthcare; More refined questions about trip to work covering people who telecommute on some days and people who use more than one mode of transportation; Data on languages spoken in Hawaii; Separate race category for "Multiracial"; Question about where a person attended college; More detailed occupation and industry data; Add a question on field of degree for advanced degrees etc.
Compare to Decennial Census (7)	It's difficult to compare because of smaller sample size in ACS; ACS documentation does not tell how to compare with Census 2000 data; Some useful data products from Census 2000 were dropped
Customer_service (3)	Better access to an actual Census employee familiar with the ACS; Need help for people who are not as computer literate
Dissemination (332)	See Table 6 for details
Documentation (175)	Positive comments mainly include that ACS documentation is useful, clear and detailed. Complaints about documentation include: too technical and too much jargon; Information is too fragmented across documents; PUMS documentation is poor; needs a better data dictionary; Better documentation of changes in questionnaire and changes in data products over time; More use of online video tutorials; Difficult to know where to look for comprehensive list of all detailed tables; Need more machine-readable documentation that users can incorporate into their applications

Code(number of comments)	Concerns and issues from respondent comments
Geography (73)	Many comments on PUMS and PUMAs: updates to boundaires more frequently; Request sub-PUMA geographies; add month of interview to PUMS. Complaints about removal of summary level 080 – county subdivision/tract; Want more support for mapping and GIS; Want to get data for an area a certain distance from a specific point on a map; Better understanding of ZCTAs and how they relate to actual zip codes; Several comments on needs for more rural data and small area data (e.g., TAZs)
Product Content (208)	More frequent data for certain types of geography (e.g., all counties); More consistent value ranges in aggregated products (e.g., age ranges); More data available at the block group level; Bring back the 3-year products; Requests for products that actually exist but the respondent is unaware of; More collapsed tables; More multi-dimensional tables, especially for age, race, sex, poverty level; More products with percentages in addition to numbers
Sample size (42)	More reliable 5-year estimates for small geographic areas; Increase the sample size (some acknowledge the budget cuts)
Timeliness (10)	More current data releases, especially for the smaller geographic areas; Reduce lag time from end of data collection to data products release; More current questions about healthcare

## Notes for Table 5:

- We did not use responses to open-ended questions for the following groups:
  - Comments that we could not understand and were coded as“???”
  - “No comment” or something similar
  - Out of Scope – requests for changes or products that go beyond the ACS (e.g., historical time series covering 100 years).
- The total number of comments added from all categories is greater than the total number of comments received (824) because some comments were assigned to more than one category.

We also broke out all comments coded to Dissemination into eight sub-categories, because this was such a large percentage of the total number of comments. Table 6 below shows these sub-categories along with a summary of the comments that fit into each of these groups.

Table 6: Summary of the respondent comments by the dissemination breakout codes

<b>Breakout code under Theme “Dissemination”</b> (number of comments)	<b>Concerns and issues from respondent comments</b>
American FactFinder (32)	Dissatisfaction with AFF, including interface not being intuitive and user friendly, difficulty in searching and finding what users need, and requests for a new or improved dissemination system
Download (43)	Frustration with downloading tract and block group data; Problems with Excel format and request for special types of format; Request for an easier way to download a large collection of geographies or tables
Mapping (14)	Request for linkage of data to map and more online apps like On the Map and Census Explorer
Query System such as the Microdata Analysis System (48)	Request for an online data query system allowing users to create their own tables for selected variables or geographies, with the ability to calculate margin of errors
Outreach (22)	Suggestions for ACS to do a better outreach, including more use of social media, more special reports in the media, recruiting new data users, making release information easier to get, reaching out to schools and librarians and creating more webinars and videos to highlight the uses of data
Press Release (4)	Suggestions for improving ACS press release, including target of some local stories to increase interest, and expansion of the embargo data to a broader group
Search (90)	Making search of data easier
Technical (79)	Suggestions to improve the technical platform of a dissemination system, including ways to create a user friendly system, utilization of GIS, making it easy to access and manipulate data such as creating pivot tables, filtering and aggregating data, expanding API and online Apps, linkage to internal/external data and website, and mashing up data

### 3.4 Responses to the Core Questions for the Four Subgroups

As mentioned above, four subgroups were determined to be of particular interest in analyzing the results from the Data Products Survey:

1. Respondents who did not provide comments to any of the open-ended questions (219)
2. Respondents who provided comments to one or more open-ended questions and those comments were coded to Dissemination (150)

3. Respondents who provided contact information, question Q9 (357)
4. Respondents from each major organizational affiliation category, question Q8 (658)

We found characteristics for each of these subgroups of respondents that helped us understand the subgroup as well as the results from all respondents better. Appendix 2. Responses to the seven core questions by subgroups) shows how the first three subgroups answered each of the seven core questions. Appendix 3. Responses to the seven core questions by organizational affiliation) does the same for the fourth subgroup based on responses to question Q8 on organizational affiliation. In this section, we go over the highlights of our findings for each of these subgroups.

### 3.4.1 Subgroup 1: Respondents who did not provide comments for any open-ended questions

The most striking feature of the subgroup that did not provide comments to any open-ended question (almost one-third of all respondents) was that its responses to almost all questions were much more positive when compared to all the respondents.

Figures 8 and 9 below illustrate this point using the ratings on Q2 (ACS data meeting user needs) and Q7 (suggestions to improve dissemination). “Comment flag” divides respondents into two groups: “Comments,” indicating respondents provided a comment for at least one open-ended question and “No comment” for those who did not provide a comment for any open-ended question.

Figure 8: Responses to Q2 by comment flag

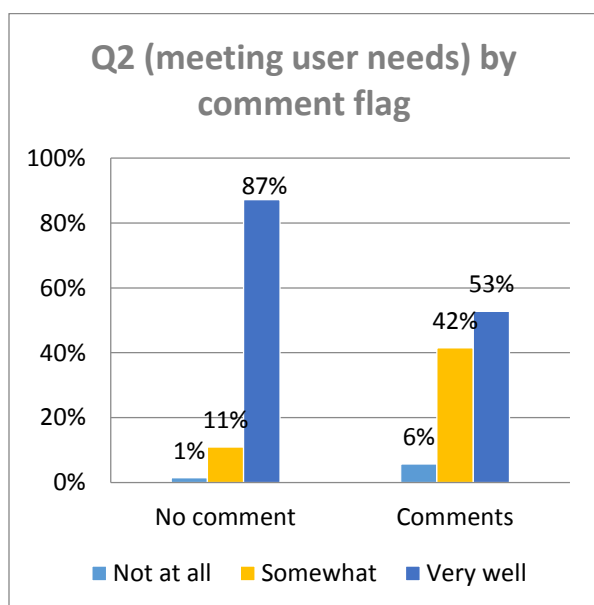
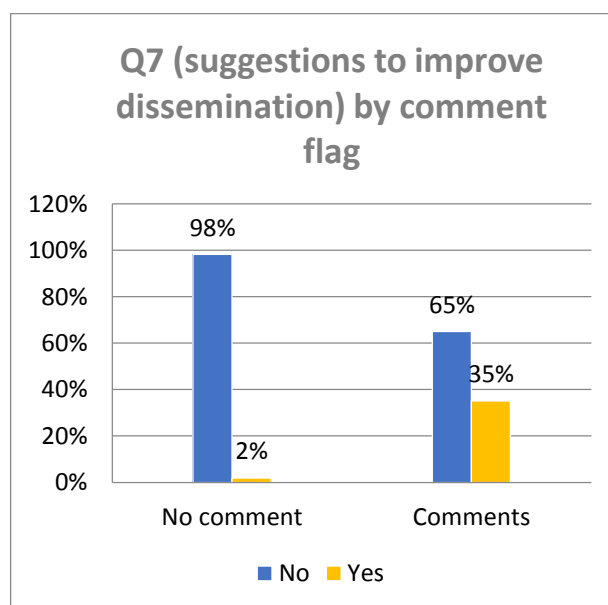


Figure 9: Responses to Q7 by comment flag



Notes for Figures 8 and 9:

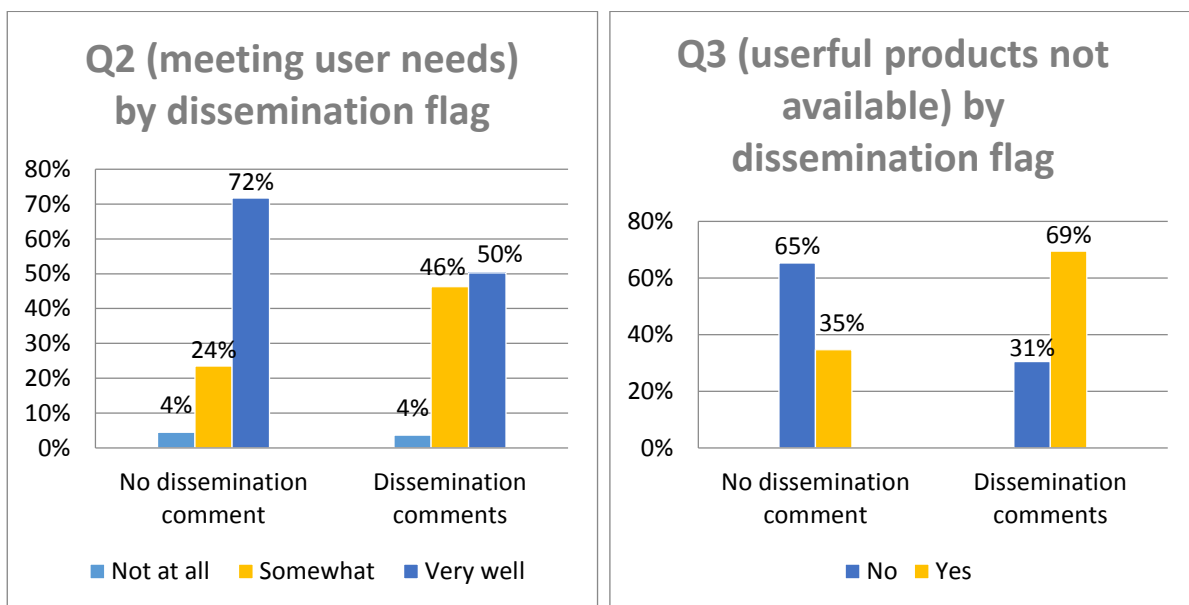
- Figure 8 shows that about 87% of those who did not respond to any open-ended questions thought the ACS data products met their needs “very well,” a result much higher than all respondents (64%).
- Figure 9 shows that this group had virtually no recommendations for improvements to dissemination – about 2% answered “Yes” to this question.
- Because we have no responses to open-ended questions from this subgroup, and their responses to the close-ended questions are very positive as shown in Figures 8 and 9, this subgroup appears to be satisfied with the ACS data products and current dissemination.

3.4.2 Subgroup 2: Respondents who gave comments coded to Dissemination

About 35% of all respondents answered at least one open-ended question with a comment that revealed concerns about the current dissemination strategy. This subgroup was the most negative in their responses to several of the core questions.

Figures 10 and 11 below illustrate this finding using Q2 (ACS data products meeting user needs) and Q3 (useful products not available). “Dissemination flag” divides respondents into two groups: “Dissemination comments,” indicating the respondents who provided comments on dissemination and “No dissemination comment” for those who did not.

Figure 10: Responses to Q2 by dissemination flag    Figure 11: Responses to Q3 by dissemination flag



Notes about Figures 10 and 11:

- About 50% of those with comments on dissemination thought the ACS data products were meeting their needs “very well,” the lowest percentage of all subgroups and much lower than the 64% rating from all respondents.
- Also, the high percentage of this group who answered “Yes” to question Q3 (Figure 11) which was really targeting the data products content indicates that this group saw missing products as a dissemination issue as well.

3.4.3 Subgroup 3: Respondents who provided contact information

About 54% of all respondents provided contact information in question Q9 for further follow-up communication from the Census Bureau. Since this percentage was higher than expected, we decided to look at this group in detail.

Figures 12 and 13 below show the response results using questions Q1B (rating experience in data content) and Q3 (useful products not available). “Contact Flag” divides respondents into two groups: “Contact info,” indicating respondents who left contact information and “No contact info,” indicating those who did not.

Figure 12: Responses to Q1B by contact flag

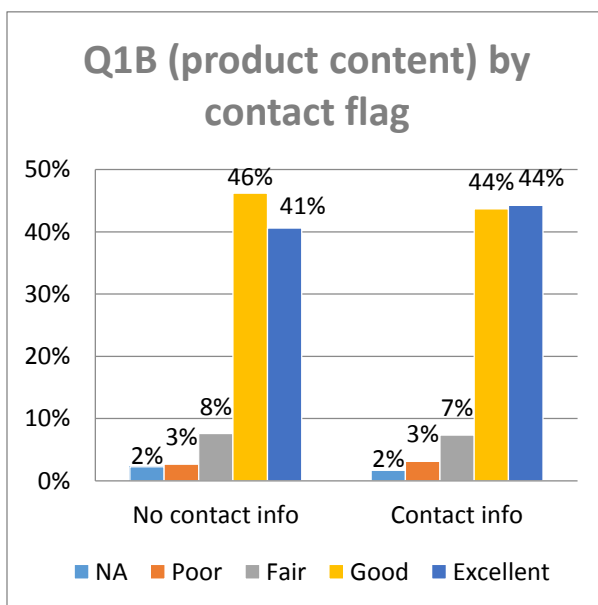
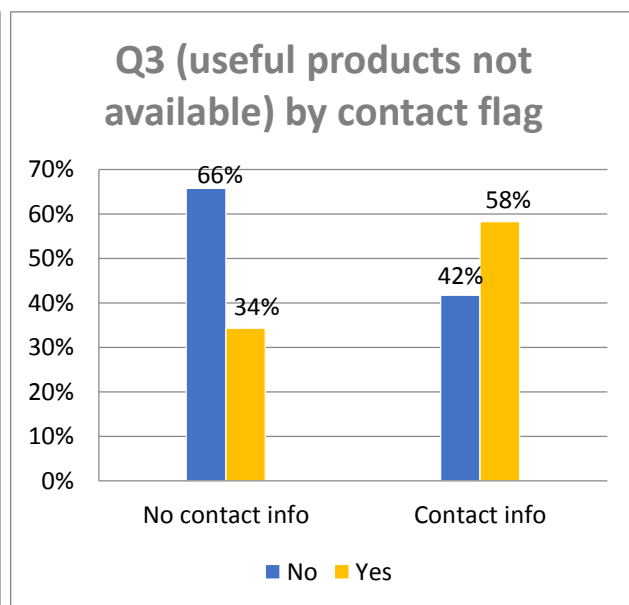


Figure 13: Responses to Q3 by contact flag



## Notes for Figures 12 and 13:

- Figure 12 shows that about 88% of those who left contact information rated the data products (Q1B) as “Good” or “Excellent.” This is slightly higher than those who did not leave contact information, but it is also higher than all respondents together (See [Appendix 2](#). Responses to the seven core questions by subgroups). However, Figure 13 shows that about 58% of those who left contact information thought there are useful products not currently available.

## 3.4.4 Subgroup 4: Respondents from each organizational affiliation category

There were 658 respondents who answered question Q8 on organizational affiliation. As described in [Section 2.3](#), we developed a method to assign a single answer to the 46 respondents who gave more than one organizational affiliation. Two groups, those in government (federal, state, local, and tribal) and those in educational institutions or think tanks were consistently more positive than respondents in other groups. On the other hand, business and media respondents tended to be more negative. The media group appears to be under-represented in the responses. Among the 12 respondents who classified themselves as in the media, only three of them left contact information. [Appendix 3](#). Responses to the seven core questions by organizational affiliation) shows the responses by question for each of the organizational affiliation.

It is also interesting to note the distribution of those who left contact information among these organizational groups as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Organizational affiliation by contact information provided

<b>Organizational Category</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>Contact Information Provided</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>
Business (excluding Media)	<b>98</b>	55	56.1%
Educational Institution or Think Tank	<b>145</b>	75	51.7%
Government (federal; state; local; or tribal)	<b>264</b>	145	54.9%
Media	<b>12</b>	3	25.0%
Non-profit organization	<b>87</b>	46	52.9%
Other	<b>52</b>	30	57.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>53.8%</b>



## 4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The 2015 Data Products Survey responses provided a rich source of feedback from many different user perspectives. The fact that so many respondents provided detailed comments for the open-ended questions made a deeper analysis of the responses possible. This is especially true for the “dissemination” topic, since 332 of the comments deal with this theme. Another rich source of user feedback were the over 200 comments that addressed concerns with the data products themselves.

It should also be noted that the respondents did not always “speak with one voice” in their comments. For example, while most respondents asked for more detail in the data products, some thought the products were overly detailed. Some respondents found certain documents useful while others complained that the same documents were not helpful or even confusing.

The comments pertaining to documentation included more positive comments than any other category. Specifically, there were several comments lauding the detail, clarity, and organization of the documentation. Several respondents liked the Compass handbooks. Also, more than one respondent was pleased by the PDF files containing the survey questions.

Because of these comments from the respondents, there is much for various Census Bureau departments and workgroups to explore. In addition, the contact information from 357 respondents will allow the Census Bureau to conduct follow-up activities with these respondents.

The Census Bureau is committed to improving ACS data products and making them easier to access and use. The analysis and survey results will serve as critical input and evaluation criteria for meeting the user needs. They will inform the ongoing work in ACS data products redesign and the new data dissemination system. We have identified four follow-up activities for the Census Bureau:

1. Share the results of survey with the following groups:
  - ACS Data Product Redesign Workgroup – comments on issues with data products
  - Center for Enterprise Dissemination Services and Consumer Innovation (CEDSCI) leadership group – comments on issues related to dissemination
  - ACS Content Council – requests for changes to the current questionnaire
  - ACS Variance Estimation and Statistical Support Branch – comments on margin of errors (MOEs) and other issues related to statistical reliability
  - ACS stakeholder external to Census Bureau – report of survey results

2. Identify changes to data products, documentation or dissemination channels that should be considered based on the survey results.
3. Engage those respondents who left their contact information. We can accomplish this in a variety of ways as the Census Bureau redesigns the ACS data products and develops new dissemination strategies, e.g., providing feedback to proposals of product changes or new design and participating in testing of the new data access tools.
4. Consider additional methods of procuring user feedback based on lessons learned from this survey, e.g., a series of focus groups with small groups of data users that discuss concerns and ideas in greater depth.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. 2015 ACS Data Products Survey questionnaire

Below are the questions along with the ID for each question (e.g., Q1A = rating of “Finding Data”). No single question was mandatory, but the software prevented the submission of an empty questionnaire.

**Q1. Please rate your overall experience using ACS data products in the following categories:**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	NA
<b>Q1A.</b> Finding Data					
<b>Q1B.</b> Data Content					
<b>Q1C.</b> Documentation					
<b>Q1D.</b> Customer Service					

**Q2. How well do the ACS data products meet your needs?**

[Very well

Somewhat

Not at all]

(If answer is “Not at all” or “Somewhat,” please tell us how the ACS data products could better meet your needs).

**Q3. Are there any data products that would be useful to you but are not available?**

[Yes

No]

(If answer is “Yes,” please describe the data products that would be useful to you but are not available).

**Q4. Which geographic areas are important to you when using ACS data products? (Select all that apply)**

- Nation
- State
- County
- Census Tract
- Census Block Group
- Place/Township
- Congressional District
- School District
- American Indian Area/Alaska Native Area/ Hawaiian Home Land
- Metropolitan/Micropolitan Statistical Area
- 5-Digit ZIP Code Tabulation Area
- Urban Area
- Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)
- Other types of geographic areas

Please describe the other types of geographic areas that are important to you when using ACS data.

**Q5. Do you create custom geographies by combining geographic areas to make your estimates?**

[Yes

No]

(If "Yes," please select any geographic levels that you combine to make your estimates).

- State
- County
- Census Tract
- Census Block Group
- Place/Township
- 5-Digit ZIP Code Tabulation Area
- Public Use Micro Area (PUMA)
- American Indian Area/Alaska Native Area/ Hawaiian Home Land
- Other types of geographic areas – please describe

**Q6. Have you ever used or tried to use any of the documentation provided on the ACS website at [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)?**

[Yes

No]

(If "Yes," do you have suggestions for how we can improve the documentation on [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs) to help you better understand the ACS data?)

**Q7. Do you have any suggestions for better ways we can disseminate ACS data products?**

[Yes

No]

(If “Yes,” please describe your suggestions for better ways we can disseminate ACS data products)

**Q8. Please select your affiliation below so that we can better understand your use of the ACS data products. (respondent allowed to select more than one affiliation)**

[check box] .... Business (excluding Media)

[check box] .....Educational Institution or Think Tank

[check box] .....Government (federal, state, local, or tribal)

[check box] .....Media

[check box] .....Non-profit organization

[check box] .....Other (If “Other”, specify in a write-in area)

**Q9. We may want to contact you to follow up on your responses to this survey. This follow-up contact will assure that we correctly understand your comments and suggestions and will help us improve the ACS data products.**

If you are willing to be contacted, please provide the following information.

This information is used by the Census Bureau for ACS data products planning purpose only and not for ongoing Census Bureau surveys. In addition, we will not share your information with other organizations.

First Name

Last Name

Telephone

Email address

Appendix 2. Responses to the seven core questions by subgroups

Note: Non-responses to each question are included in this table. This will cause differences between percentages for some of the other categories vs. those shown in the graphs in this report, since the graphs exclude non-responses.

Question/ response	All respondents	No contact info	With contact info	No responses to open- ended questions	Responded to at least one open- ended question	No comments on dissemination	Commented on dissemination
Total in group	665	308	357	219	446	429	236
<b>Q1A</b>							
NA	2.1%	2.9%	1.4%	1.8%	2.2%	3.0%	0.4%
Poor	6.3%	7.8%	5.0%	3.2%	7.8%	4.2%	10.2%
Fair	18.8%	16.9%	20.4%	8.2%	24.0%	14.2%	27.1%
Good	44.7%	46.4%	43.1%	52.1%	41.0%	46.6%	41.1%
Excellent	27.7%	25.3%	29.7%	33.8%	24.7%	31.2%	21.2%
No response	0.5%	0.6%	0.3%	0.9%	0.2%	0.7%	0.0%
<b>Q1B</b>							
NA	2.3%	2.9%	1.7%	1.8%	2.5%	2.8%	1.3%
Poor	2.9%	2.6%	3.1%	0.5%	4.0%	2.3%	3.8%
Fair	7.4%	7.5%	7.3%	3.2%	9.4%	6.1%	9.7%
Good	44.4%	45.5%	43.4%	42.0%	45.5%	41.5%	49.6%
Excellent	42.1%	39.9%	44.0%	51.1%	37.7%	45.9%	35.2%
No response	1.1%	1.6%	0.6%	1.4%	0.9%	1.4%	0.4%
<b>Q1C</b>							
NA	6.6%	9.1%	4.5%	6.4%	6.7%	8.2%	3.8%
Poor	3.6%	4.2%	3.1%	1.4%	4.7%	3.3%	4.2%
Fair	17.1%	18.2%	16.2%	10.5%	20.4%	13.5%	23.7%
Good	42.1%	41.6%	42.6%	41.1%	42.6%	39.6%	46.6%
Excellent	29.3%	25.6%	32.5%	38.8%	24.7%	33.8%	21.2%
No response	1.2%	1.3%	1.1%	1.8%	0.9%	1.6%	0.4%
<b>Q1D</b>							
NA	40.9%	45.1%	37.3%	41.6%	40.6%	42.0%	39.0%
Poor	5.1%	5.5%	4.8%	2.3%	6.5%	3.7%	7.6%
Fair	11.9%	13.0%	10.9%	8.7%	13.5%	10.5%	14.4%
Good	22.4%	19.8%	24.6%	22.4%	22.4%	21.4%	24.2%
Excellent	16.2%	12.7%	19.3%	21.0%	13.9%	18.6%	11.9%
No response	3.5%	3.9%	3.1%	4.1%	3.1%	3.7%	3.0%

Question/ response	All respondents	No contact info	With contact info	No responses to open- ended questions	Responded to at least one open- ended question	No comments on dissemination	Commented on dissemination
Q2							
Not at all*	4.2%	5.8%	2.8%	1.4%	5.6%	4.7%	3.4%
Somewhat*	30.8%	30.5%	31.1%	10.5%	40.8%	22.8%	45.3%
Very well	62.4%	62.3%	62.5%	84.0%	51.8%	69.7%	49.2%
No response	2.6%	1.3%	3.6%	4.1%	1.8%	2.8%	2.1%
Q3							
No	49.5%	61.0%	39.5%	86.3%	31.4%	60.6%	29.2%
Yes*	44.4%	31.8%	55.2%	4.6%	63.9%	32.2%	66.5%
No response	6.2%	7.1%	5.3%	9.1%	4.7%	7.2%	4.2%
Q6							
No	28.3%	36.7%	21.0%	43.4%	20.9%	35.0%	16.1%
Yes*	70.2%	62.3%	77.0%	53.9%	78.3%	63.2%	83.1%
No response	1.5%	1.0%	2.0%	2.7%	0.9%	1.9%	0.8%
Q7							
No	74.0%	82.1%	66.9%	95.9%	63.2%	91.1%	42.8%
Yes*	23.5%	15.3%	30.5%	1.8%	34.1%	6.3%	54.7%
No response	2.6%	2.6%	2.5%	2.3%	2.7%	2.6%	2.5%

\*given opportunity to comment further (open-ended question)

**Comments on Appendix 2:**

1. The first data column is for all responses. After that, the responses are shown for three different breakouts of all responses. Each color represents a different way of partitioning the respondents into two subgroups:

**blue** -those who did not leave contact information compared with those who did

**yellow** -those who did not respond to any open-ended questions compared with those who responded to at least one open-ended questions

**green** - those who did not have any comments coded to "Dissemination" compared to those who did have one or more such comments.

2. The first group in the yellow partition, those with no responses to open-ended questions, responds to all questions much more positively when compared to all other subgroups and to all respondents together. This subgroup is almost 1/3 of all responses. So, the overall result is greatly influenced by this subgroup.

3. At the other end of the spectrum, those who commented on dissemination issues, the second green group, were the most critical/negative in their responses. This subgroup represents over 35% of all respondents. This group also had the smallest percent (49.2) who said the data products met their needs "very well" (Q2) and the largest percent (66.5) who said there are useful data products not currently available (Q3).

4. The blue partition, comparing those who did not leave contact information with those who did leave this information is also quite interesting for two reasons.

First, if we add the percents for "Good" and "Excellent" together for each of the four parts of question Q1, we see that those who left contact information are somewhat more positive in their ratings for each of the four parts of Q1 than all respondents as well as those who did not leave contact information.

Second, those who did leave contact information are much more likely to say there are useful products not currently available (Q3) and more likely to have ideas for improvements to dissemination (Q7) than are all respondents as well as those who did not leave contact information

Appendix 3. Responses to the seven core questions by organizational affiliation

Question/ Response	None given	Business (excluding Media)	Educational Institution or Think Tank	Government (federal; state; local; or tribal)	Media	Non-profit organization	Other
<b>Q1A</b>							
NA	0.0%	1.0%	2.1%	0.8%	16.7%	1.1%	9.6%
Poor	14.3%	10.2%	7.6%	3.8%	0.0%	5.7%	9.6%
Fair	28.6%	20.4%	20.0%	15.5%	33.3%	20.7%	21.2%
Good	14.3%	37.8%	40.7%	52.3%	25.0%	42.5%	42.3%
Excellent	42.9%	29.6%	29.7%	27.3%	25.0%	28.7%	17.3%
No response	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%
<b>Q1B</b>							
NA	0.0%	2.0%	2.1%	0.8%	16.7%	1.1%	9.6%
Poor	14.3%	5.1%	2.1%	1.1%	0.0%	3.4%	7.7%
Fair	28.6%	9.2%	6.9%	5.7%	8.3%	8.0%	9.6%
Good	14.3%	41.8%	34.5%	51.9%	33.3%	44.8%	44.2%
Excellent	42.9%	39.8%	54.5%	39.8%	41.7%	39.1%	28.8%
No response	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%
<b>Q1C</b>							
NA	0.0%	6.1%	4.8%	5.7%	25.0%	5.7%	15.4%
Poor	14.3%	5.1%	4.8%	1.1%	0.0%	4.6%	7.7%
Fair	57.1%	19.4%	14.5%	16.3%	50.0%	14.9%	15.4%
Good	0.0%	33.7%	42.8%	46.2%	8.3%	46.0%	42.3%
Excellent	28.6%	33.7%	33.1%	29.9%	16.7%	24.1%	19.2%
No response	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	4.6%	0.0%



Question/ Response	None given	Business (excluding Media)	Educational Institution or Think Tank	Government (federal; state; local; or tribal)	Media	Non-profit organization	Other
<b>Q1D</b>							
NA	28.6%	39.8%	31.0%	39.8%	58.3%	39.1%	44.2%
Poor	14.3%	7.1%	6.2%	2.3%	0.0%	6.9%	9.6%
Fair	28.6%	12.2%	8.3%	14.8%	25.0%	9.2%	5.8%
Good	0.0%	20.4%	24.1%	23.9%	0.0%	20.7%	25.0%
Excellent	28.6%	16.3%	16.6%	17.0%	16.7%	14.9%	11.5%
No response	0.0%	4.1%	2.1%	2.3%	0.0%	9.2%	3.8%
<b>Q2</b>							
Not at all*	14.3%	9.2%	1.4%	1.5%	16.7%	2.3%	15.4%
Somewhat*	28.6%	27.6%	27.6%	32.2%	33.3%	33.3%	34.6%
Very well	57.1%	58.2%	69.0%	64.4%	50.0%	60.9%	48.1%
No response	0.0%	5.1%	2.1%	1.9%	0.0%	3.4%	1.9%
<b>Q3</b>							
No	57.1%	49.0%	44.1%	52.3%	50.0%	43.7%	59.6%
Yes*	42.9%	45.9%	48.3%	42.4%	50.0%	47.1%	34.6%
No response	0.0%	5.1%	7.6%	5.3%	0.0%	9.2%	5.8%
<b>Q6</b>							
No	57.1%	31.6%	27.6%	25.4%	41.7%	21.8%	42.3%
Yes*	42.9%	66.3%	71.0%	73.1%	58.3%	77.0%	55.8%
No response	0.0%	2.0%	1.4%	1.5%	0.0%	1.1%	1.9%
<b>Q7</b>							
No	85.7%	71.4%	71.7%	73.9%	100.0%	74.7%	76.9%
Yes*	0.0%	25.5%	26.2%	23.9%	0.0%	20.7%	23.1%
No response	14.3%	3.1%	2.1%	2.3%	0.0%	4.6%	0.0%

\*given opportunity to comment further (open-ended question)

#### Notes about Appendix 3:

1. In general, respondents in the Business and Media groups are more negative than those in other groups
2. The responses from those in any type of government agency tended to be more positive
3. Respondents from non-profit organizations had the highest percentage of experience with ACS documentation

## Appendix 4. Non-response rates for the survey questions

<b>Question ID</b>	<b>Question name</b>	<b>Total non-responses</b>	<b>Rate (divided by 665)</b>
Q1A	Find data	3	0.5%
Q1B	Product contents	7	1.1%
Q1C	Documentation	8	1.2%
Q1D	Customer service	23	3.5%
Q2	Meeting needs	17	2.6%
Q3	Useful products	41	6.2%
Q4	Geography	0	0.0%
Q5	Custom geography	15	2.3%
Q6	ACS documentation	10	1.5%
Q7	Dissemination	17	2.6%
Q8	Affiliation	7	1.1%
Q9	Contact information	308	46.3%