

Setting new standards in the use of estimates from the American Community Survey

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How are 3 Federal agencies using it?

	ACS variable	Geographic areas	dataset used	purpose
Housing Choice Voucher Program	median family income	metropolitan areas, parts of metropolitan areas, counties	5-year (primarily) & 1-year	establish eligibility criteria
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	population living in households with incomes below 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Line	states	1-year	evaluate program performance
Urbanized Area Formula Grant	population living in households with incomes below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line	urbanized areas	5-year	allocate funds

Census Bureau recommendations

- Balance timeliness & precision
- Use the margin of error

Housing Choice Voucher Program income threshold calculation

estimate choice for 2013

<i>calculations</i>	<i>reason</i>	<i>type of reason</i>
2007-2011 5-year ACS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is most precise of the three datasets released in 2013. 2. It is the most recent available at the time of calculation 3. It provides estimates for all geographic areas of concern 	<p>precision</p> <p>timeliness</p> <p>geographic</p>
2011 1-year ACS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regulations ask for the most recent data 	timeliness/ statutory

Alternative choices consistent with the above reasoning

2009-2011 3-year ACS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The use of this data does not alter the outcome of the calculations. 	computational
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SNAP Program Access Index calculation

estimate choice for 2013

<i>calculations</i>	<i>reason</i>	<i>type of reason</i>
2012 1-year ACS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is more precise than the CPS.2. It is available sufficiently before the September 30 deadline for allocation.3. The data is for the prior year alone.	precision statutory timeliness/ statutory

Urbanized Area Formula Grant program distribution calculation

estimate choice for 2013

<i>calculations</i>	<i>reason</i>	<i>type of reason</i>
2007-2011 5-year ACS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is most precise of the three datasets released in 2013.2. It is the most recent available at the time of calculation3. This dataset can be used for allocations under a similar program for nonmetropolitan areas	<p>precision</p> <p>timeliness</p> <p>geographic</p>

There are other reasons

- Timeliness
- Precision
- Geography
- Computation
- Statutory

program	Use of Margin of error in selecting an estimate	Use of margin of error in reporting the data	Use of margin of error in policy activities
Housing Choice Voucher Program	Yes	No	No
SNAP	No	No	No
Urbanized Area Formula Grant program	No	Yes	No

“It is a hard job
for the housing authorities to make these
determinations. Do we really want to
make it harder for them?”

Peter B. Kahn, HUD

“We operate in a framework where people don’t like a range of answers. They expect a single answer to every question.”

Robert Dalrymple, FNS

The objective of the FTA is to be consistent across all areas. Making exceptions for one area because of a statistical tie would not be consistent.

David Schneider, FTA

What issues determine how your organization uses the ACS?

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