How to tell the ACS Story

ACS Data Users Conference
May 2015

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What if Members of Congress only heard this from constituents?

Is this survey legit? Is it a scam?

I don’t like this question

Why do I have to fill this out?

This questionnaire is too snoopy

Will I be fined if I don’t send it back?
“Does anyone in [insert state name] care about census data?”
Without Congressional Support, What Might Happen?

• Could the American Community Survey became a **voluntary survey**?

• Could the 2020 Census and other key census programs be **underfunded or funded too late** for adequate design and testing?
Instead, what if......

We informed our elected officials that [Minnesotans] depend on data from the American Community Survey, decennial census, economic census, and other great census programs?
MACS was launched March 2013

MN coalition to preserve ACS Census data

MACS Mission.

Educate Minnesota’s Members of Congress and the public about the critical importance of census data to drive a strong economy and improve the well-being of all Minnesotans.

www.minnesotansforacs.org

What works?
• Reasonable voices
• Voices of leaders
• Diverse stakeholders -- Not your typical coalition
• Nonpartisan
• Education – “Here’s how we use it, and this is what would (not) happen without it.”
2012  5 MN data users - “What can we do to preserve the ACS?”

2013  “Let’s go!” MACS begins with 12 supporters, growing to 60 by June & over 100 by December

2014  
• Relationships deepened with all 10 congressional offices
• Web site launched www.minnesotansforacs.org

2015  
• 135 organizations/individuals
• Members of MN congressional delegation sign supportive letters to appropriations subcommittees
• MACS supporters write resolutions, send letters, and join office visits
• Leveraging national and local organizations and partners in other key states
We use ACS data to understand and forecast Minnesota population trends for state policy and the legislature.

We use ACS data to site new stores.

We use data to analyze health insurance across the U.S.

We use the ACS to create IPUMS files for data users everywhere.

We use ACS data for economic development and to attract jobs.
MACS Voices Tell the Value of the ACS

We the ACS

Why are ACS Census data important?

We love the ACS

Minnesota State Demographer Susan Brower Discusses the Importance of a Strong ACS

State officials

County Resolution

Local Planning Office

Small Business

21 Chambers across US

Local Chamber of Commerce

University Dean

“Why are ACS Census data important?”

“Why are ACS Census data important?”
Telling the ACS Story

• **Who needs to hear the story**
  • Stakeholders
  • Leaders in the community in all sectors of civic and economic life
  • **Members of Congress**
  • The public

• **Data drive tremendous value**
  • Census data are comprehensive by topic, geography, and over time.
  • Local, state, and national policy, programs, funding.

• **What’s at stake**
  • No other source for these data
  • Non-census data are spotty, unreliable, unavailable, or inaccessible
  • Rural and small places, and small populations are particularly at risk
  • How would $400+ billion in federal funds be distributed annually without ACS data?
Some of the issues we hear about

• Issue: Negative respondent calls
  • Response: But response rates are high!
  • Response: Census Bureau Respondent Advocate is a great resource. New tool -- “Why we ask”
  • Response: Favorable local stories!

• Issue: Never a top priority, far away, esoteric, not urgent, does anyone care?
  • Response: Making it real, telling a story, talking about local benefits for the economy and well-being of residents
  • Response: Tailored messages (rural, business/jobs, education, veterans)
  • Response: 2020 is just around the corner

• Issue: Myths abound!
  • Response: Being prepared
  • Response: We don’t have to be experts. There are resources to help.
• Could the ACS survey actually become voluntary? What would happen to our data (quality and availability)?
  • What’s Canada’s experience, you say?

• How is the Census Bureau responding to concerns about “intrusive” questions?

• Would Congress really withhold funding or authorization in a way that would degrade our data? What happens then?

• Who are your supporters? Is this partisan?

• Do other states have something like MACS?
MACS Toolkit
Engaging local voices in support of ACS and 2020 Census data

Why are local voices important?
- It works -- Members of Congress listen to constituents.
- It counter-balances the negative blogs, press, and videos.

It’s not hard to start something like this
- It’s an easy “ask”. Leaders, analysts, & investors understand the importance of consistent, reliable data.
- Leveraging existing resources and networks.
- The audience is ready --- a staff member in each congressional office owns “Census”.

National partners are engaged
- Counties and Cities: NACo, League of Cities, Conference of Mayors...
- Professional and data associations: American Statistical Association, PAA, APDU...
- And many more...
10 Steps to Start Something

1. Create a **mission** statement
2. Identify & enlist **supporters**
3. Form a **steering** committee
4. Create data **stories**
5. **Reach out to congressional offices.**
6. **Coordinate** with **MACS**, APDU, The Census Project
7. **Maintain contact with Congress** [*reach out at key moments*]
8. **Communicate** *(copy web site  http://minnesotansforacs.org/*)
9. **Network** with (local/national) **organizations**
10. Engage the **media**

“It’s a great encore career for boomers!”
Resources, questions, comments......

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http://minnesotansforacs.org

http://www.thecensusproject.org/