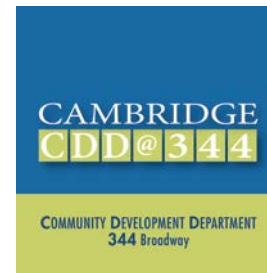# Producing Neighborhood Statistics with ACS Blockgroup Data

City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

Community Development Department

Clifford Cook, Senior Planning Information Manager

ccook@cambridgema.gov

From Factfinder to Publication

Small Neighborhoods = Small Sample Size

Cambridge neighborhoods range in population

(1,300 – 13,400 people)

Smaller populations = wider margins of error + less accuracy

Unexpected statistics that raise questions

To consider: Will reporting margin of error create communication issues with the general public?

Counts or Derived Statistics?

Counts can be misinterpreted as precise representations of reality

Discrepancies exist between ACS counts and other data sources

Officeholders and the public raise questions about accuracy

Solution: Use derived statistics (percentages, medians, etc.) to make it clear that we're describing "characteristics" – not size.

Problematic "Industry" Jargon

ACS includes specialized terminology and uses common words in particular ways

Census terminology is not always transparent to the public
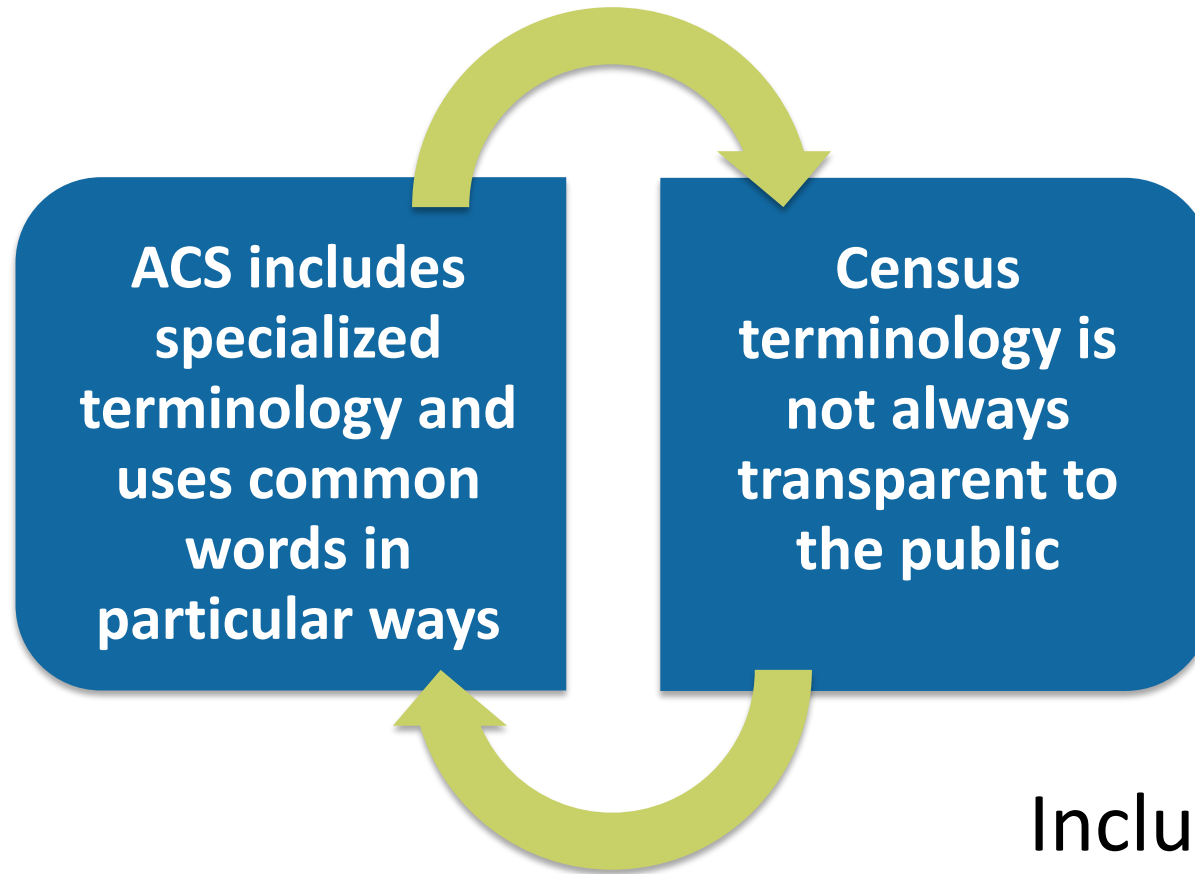
Solution:

Include a glossary at the **front** of the publication.

Definition of Vacancy

ACS definition of vacant: "no one is living in [the unit] at the time of interview."

Discrepancy leads to misinterpretation and confusion

Colloquial definition of vacant in Cambridge: a unit that is for rent or for sale.

Solution: Report "Market Vacant" and "Other Vacant" numbers, which are more congruous with local public understanding.

College and Graduate Students

ACS includes college and graduate students living in a community in some statistics but not others

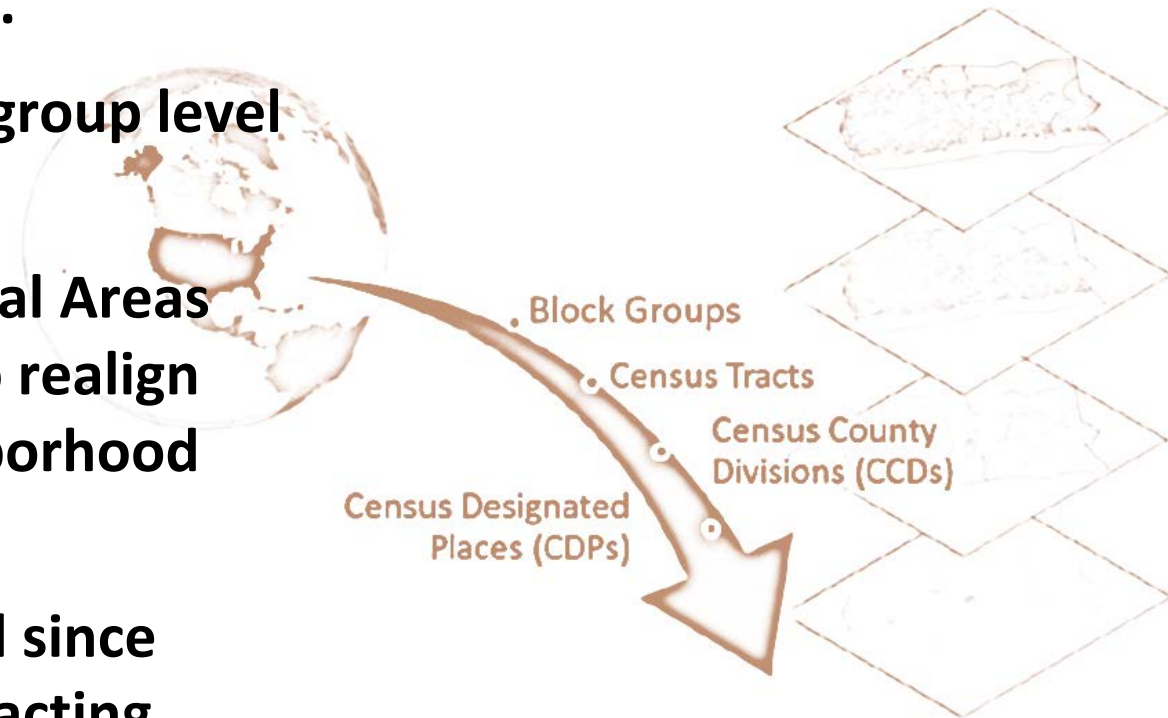**This may produce unexpected or confusing results for the general public**

People may question the value of ACS data

Solution: Be clear about which statistics include students (and why), particularly students living in dormitories (i. e., Group Quarters).

Looking to the Future

- **Compiling neighborhood information from blockgroup data limits the range of information available.**

- **Many tables flagged as available at the blockgroup level are blank in practice**

- **Through the 2020 Census Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP) we are seeking permission to realign census tract boundaries to conform to neighborhood boundaries.**

- **Our neighborhood boundaries are unchanged since 1950s. We think we have a good case for retracting.**

Block Groups

Census Tracts

Census County Divisions (CCDs)

Census Designated Places (CDPs)

Thank You!