Congress and the ACS

Evolution of the American Community Survey

1990: Congress expresses interest in more timely “long-form” data.

1996: Census Bureau begins testing a continuous survey in 4 counties, increasing to 36 counties by 1999.

2000: Census Bureau launches Census 2000 Supplementary Survey with a national sample to test the ACS concept on a large scale.

2005: ACS implemented nationwide, replacing census long form in 2010 and beyond.

2006: First ACS estimates (based on 2005 ACS) released for areas with populations of 65,000 and greater.
Major Congressional Actions

- No Vote in Congress to create ACS.
  - 2002 GAO opinion ruled Census Bureau had sufficient legal authority—Section 141 & 193 of the Census Act—to create ACS.
- Extensive congressional involvement in ACS evolution
  - Informal briefings
  - Hearings
  - House and Senate appropriations guidance
      - Recommended outside evaluation on representation of rural communities in ACS design, FY 1998 (Senate #105-48)
      - Directed internet response, FY 2008 (H.R. 3093)
      - Requested study on voluntary response, FY 2002 (December 2003, “Meeting 21st Century Demographic Data Needs—Implementing the American Community Survey”)
Recent Congressional Opposition to ACS

- RNC Adopts ACS resolution, August 2010
  - Eliminate or make ACS voluntary

- Legislation
  - Make ACS response voluntary
    - H.R. 3131 (111th Congress)
    - H.R. 931 (112th Congress)
    - Proposed amendments to H.R. 1 (112th Congress)
      - Lankford and Mack—eliminate ACS funding
      - Pearce—eliminate periodic census funding
      - Michaud—shift $80 million from Periodic Census
Response from Census Stakeholders

- Census Bureau
  - ACS Compass handbooks
  - Multimedia videos on ACS uses

- Stakeholders
  - Briefings
    - March 2011, Business and Government Uses of ACS
    - Meetings with congressional staff
    - Census Project coalition
FY 2011 and FY 2012 ACS Funding

FY 2011
- Request--$247.9 million
  - $44 million requested increase over FY10
  - Initiate plans to increase sample from 2.9 to 3.5 million housing units (2.5 % of population)
  - 100% non-response follow-up targeted operation
  - Full review of 3 and 5 year data

FY 2012
- Request-- $247.5 million
  - Test Internet response option
  - Continue plans for increased sample size
Congress and the ACS

Status of FY 2012 Deliberations

- House Report #112-169 (July 2011)
  - $855.3 million
  - $294 million below FY2011
  - $169 million below FY 2012 request

- Report Language
  - Requests report on small population groups 90 days after enactment, "describing the steps it will take to ensure the availability and accuracy of these data."
  - Share its best practices for reaching “hard-to-count” communities with state and local governments.
Status of FY 2012 Deliberations

- Senate Report #112-078 (September 2011)
  - $943.3 million
  - $206.4 million below FY2011
  - $81.4 million below FY 2012 request

- Report Language
  - Concern about cost containment in periodic census programs
  - Preserve funding for Economic Census, but first “focus on reductions to periodic censuses and agency-wide administrative cost savings.”
  - Consider budgeting for Census 2020 below Census 2010 level and spend less than Census 2000 (not adjusted for inflation)
Congress and the ACS

Congress and Census Stakeholders: Shared Interests

- Funding
- Number and Nature of Questions
- Implementation of Group Quarters
- Sample Size
- Technology
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