Grass roots support for critical census data

The MACS story....

APDU Annual Conference
September 17, 2014
Joan Naymark, Director MACS
What if?

• What if the American Community Survey became a voluntary survey?

• What if the 2020 Census and other key census programs were underfunded or funded too late for adequate design and testing?

• What if elected officials only heard from people who didn’t like the ACS or Census Long Form?

• What if the business community, policy makers, leaders, analysts, and data users never talked about how important census data are for their industry, community, constituents, or local area?
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?
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?
We use ACS data to understand and forecast Minnesota population trends for state policy and the legislature.

We use data to site new stores.

We use ACS 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 was launched March 2013

MN Grass roots coalition to preserve ACS Census data

MACS Mission is to 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
MACS Timeline

• **2012** A casual conversation among 5 MN data users. “What can we do to preserve the ACS?”

• **2013**
  - Legislation to make the ACS a voluntary survey introduced. H.R. 1078 & S. 530
  - “Let’s go!” MACS begins with 12 supporters, growing to 60 by June & over 100 by December
  - MACS attracts a wide variety of organizations from across Minnesota
  - Steering committee: State & local government, education, private sector, & nonprofits
  - Connecting with Minnesota’s congressional delegation

• **2014**
  - Relationships deepened with Minnesota’s 10 congressional offices
  - Web site launched [www.minnesotansforacs.org](http://www.minnesotansforacs.org)
  - Travels around MN and to professional organizations – getting the word out
  - Communicating at key moments when support is needed.

“Why are ACS Census data important to MN?
“We ♥ the ACS”
Could the 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 actually withhold funding or authorization in a way that would degrade our data?  What then?

Who are your supporters?  Is this a partisan issue?

Do other states have something like MACS?
MacS Toolkit

How to leverage grass roots support in other states, communities, industries.....

Why are local voices important?
• It works -- Members of Congress listen to constituents.
• To counter-balance the negative blogs, press, and videos. “Census data drive sound decisions, policy, economic growth, and the well-being of communities everywhere. Here are local examples......”

Is it hard to start something like this?
• It’s an easy “ask”. Leaders, analysts, & investors understand the importance of consistent, reliable data. Once they understand what’s at risk, they’re quick to support the mission.
• Not many resources are required. Copy/paste from the MacS website.
• The audience is ready --- a staff member in each congressional office owns “Census”.

The Mission is simple
Educate Members of Congress and the public about the importance of data to promote the prosperity and well-being of ............ (insert your state, industry, community here)
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 staff**ers
6. **Coordinate** with MACS, APDU, The Census Project
7. **Maintain contact with Congress** [*reach out at key moments]*
8. **Communicate** (*web site -copy* [http://minnesotansforacs.org/](http://minnesotansforacs.org/))
9. **Network** with (local) **organizations**
10. Engage the **media**
Questions, comments, advice?

joan.g.naymark@gmail.com

http://minnesotansforacs.org