

Library Perspectives on Managing Customer Services for *American FactFinder*

Steve Beleu, Regional Depository Librarian, Oklahoma Department of Libraries;
Oklahoma State Data Center Coordinating Agency Director

This will address some of the customer service issues involved with providing service for the Census Bureau's *American FactFinder* search engine (hereafter referred to as *AFF*).

- Look at the Census homepage, www.census.gov. When you click on “People” and “Business” you see access to Census data by topics. This is the future, and is in effect a preview of the Census homepage of the future when access to data is by topic. The future homepage is also supposed to merge the topics of “People” and “Business” together. When you scroll to the bottom of the homepage you see columns of links to datasets. This is in effect the former Census homepage. In between the future and past homepages is the current Census homepage.
- You have to turn off your popup blocker for the Census homepage. You also have to work with whoever does IT in your library. What I call “local conditions,” which are the ways in which your IT staff or person sets up your Internet access, can block your access to all--or what happens more frequently--some of the tools of the Census website. Example: at one library I was able to create a map using the “Map” feature in the “Select Geographies” filter, but I wasn’t able to create a map using “Reference Maps,” which is the same software, from the American FactFinder (hereafter referred to as “AFF”) homepage. But in another library I was able to create a map using “Reference Maps” but couldn’t create map using the “Map” feature in the “Select Geographies” filter!
- When you save your work you can save it to the C drive or elsewhere on your computer by using either AFF’s “Bookmark” or “Save Query” feature. But you need to tell your library customers to save their work only in the “Save Query” feature, and to save it onto their own flashdrive. Otherwise the cumulative “Saved Queries” of your library customers will eventually clutter up your library computers. If they save their search strategy—this is what they actually save, not their data—by using “Bookmark” they will be prompted to create a “Bookmarks Tool Bar” and “Bookmarks Menu” on your library’s computers. Eventually these cumulative “Bookmarks” will also clutter up your library computers. “Save Query”

is recommended instead of “Bookmarks”. When you or they access their saved work they’ll click either “Save Query” or “Bookmark”.

Do you get the same questions over and over? Don’t search them again and again. Use “Save Query” to save your search strategy and save time.

- When you or your library customers save files either a) give them filenames that will mean something when they see them later, or b) give them a code number and record what that number means elsewhere.
- Always use the “Back to Search” button to go back one screen rather than clicking your computer’s back button. Otherwise you may be thrown out of the Census website.
- Always keep checking what is in AFF’s “Your Selections” box. This is the main filter for all your AFF work. If something hasn’t been moved to ‘Your Selections’ it won’t be searched.

HOMEPAGE FEATURES

1. There are 3 help files here: “Using Factfinder” only tells you how to use “Quick Search”. “FAQs” is one of the best developed FAQ features of any .gov website, is frequently updated, and has both an e-mail inquiry form and a live chat link. But “Help” is the most useful of the three because it contains the most detailed information about how to search, what to do with your returned search results, Tutorials that you can watch on your computer, and a very important A-Z glossary of terms. This glossary is also directly linked to on the AFF homepage. Most Census terms you need to know about are in this glossary.

2. Having bad problems searching for data? Using the “Feedback” button can get an answer. But before you use “Feedback” always search the FAQs: someone else may have had the same question.

3. You can use “Address Search” here as an *Everything Tool*: enter an address, then click on a geography to see all the data tables that exist for that address within the geography that you choose. The most tables show up for Census Tract, then Block Group, then Block.

4. Cite your data. My **Choosing Census Data** handout includes the entire Census Bureau's current citation guide on pages 5 and 6 of it - <http://www.odl.state.ok.us/usinfo/pubs/Census-Choosing.pdf>

QUICK SEARCH FEATURES

1. *Quick Start* is not basic searching; *Topics*, *Geographies*, and *Race and Ethnic Groups* are not advanced searching. If you think that Quick Start is basic searching you and your library customers may not ever use the other three tools. They are all basic search tools.

2. You may wonder about why you would use "Table Shells" rather than just clicking on the data table and viewing the data. Here's why: Table Shells load more quickly than data tables. They can save you time.

TOPICS

Here's how to best search in Topics: a) choose "Datasets," then b) add the datasets you want to search into "Your Selections". Then select topics from "People" and "Housing". As second choice, choose "Program" first; as third choice, choose "Product Type" *if* you know what these choices mean.

GEOGRAPHIES

What I call "local conditions" greatly affect whether you can access maps at all, or maps just a bit, or maps only now and then. "Local conditions" are set by your IT staff, or if you are your IT staff, by you. The choices that you make determine whether you can use Census maps or not.

You may or may not be able to use the zoom feature in tools when you choose "Map". But you have a better chance of using the "Find a Location" tool. With this tool you can get maps for small towns and cities for which you can get a map from no place else. Remember to use the drilldown to choose small geographies when using it.

About the four types of tools here: "Point," "Rectangle," and "Polygon" work well enough. But there is a better tool for "Circle" that is available from the Missouri State Data Center, titled "Circular Area Profiles," because it will let you choose between 1 and 5 mileage ranges –

<http://mcdc.missouri.edu/websas/caps10c.html>

How to use this: 1) go to the U.S. Geological Survey's GNIS website to get your lat/long coordinates to use in "Circular Area Profiles" at <http://geonames.usgs.gov> or enter a zip code. 2) You next enter between 1 and 5 mileage ranges in "Enter up to 5 radius values". 3) Choose a state; this isn't necessary but will shorten your search time. 4) Either accept or change your geographic units to be searched.

But one thing common to both these Census map tools and MSDC map tools is that the geography you choose will be "fuzzy". This means that for whatever geography the line of a "Point," "Rectangle," "Polygon," or "Circle" goes through that entire geography will be added to your search. If you add precise, "unfuzzy" geographies you will have to use ArcView or another GIS software.

Be aware that the geography of "Rural" is a negative definition: "rural" is whatever "urban" isn't. An urban geography, with some qualifications, consists of a geography of 2,500+ people. Less than "urban" is "rural".

The main factor that determines the geography of a Census block are roads and streets. When communities build more roads and streets, they get more Census blocks.

Some geography totals in the 2010 Decennial Census -

Census tracts – 73,057

Block Groups – 217,740

Census blocks – 11,078,297

Incorporated places – 19,540

Unincorporated places that participated in the Census Designated Places program – 9,721

Native American Areas (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian) - 695

RACE AND ETHNIC GROUPS

If you choose "Ancestry" you will only find data for Hispanics from Portugal and Brazil, but not from Spain, Mexico, Guatemala, etc. The Census Bureau believes that this data is covered in the "Country of Birth" choice. But since the idea of "Ancestry" includes not only first-generation Hispanics but later-generation Hispanics, this is a mistake and the "Ancestry" data here is bad.

An American Indian tribe doesn't have to be federally recognized to have had data collected for it in the Decennial Census. You will find data for tribes that are not federally recognized.

Remember that the data for American Indian tribes and tribal groupings is data that was self-reported and will not correspond to official tribal enrollment data.

NOTES ON ACS

Of utmost importance when you work with ACS data is that you realize and accurately report the data that ACS gives for a geography. For example in the ACS of 2006 – 2010 the population given for Broken Arrow, Oklahoma **is not** 94,755. What Census actually says is that they have a 90% level of confidence that the actual population of Broken Arrow between 2006 and 2010 was between 94,755 people *minus* 89 people through 94,755 people *plus* 89 people. To report the population for Broken Arrow as 94,755 is to report it wrongly.

The term “Margin of Error” does not mean “mistake”. It means “from the Lower Confidence Level through the Upper Confidence Level”. But since this explanation will mean nothing to most users, you can better think of it and understand it as meaning “range of data”.

How you will use the differences between a “B” and a “C” table in a library: after you do a search you may get either a “B” and/or a “C” table or possibly neither. If you get both a “Basic” table and a “Collapsed” table here is how you can use them: there will be more detailed data in a “Basic” table, but more summary data in a “Collapsed” table. Your library customer may find one more useful than the other.

Census statisticians have agreed that any data that has a value of zero will have a MOE of 109. This is not an arbitrary number but is based on much research.

Look in the “ID” field of your search results for “NP” ids. They are “Narrative Profiles” that are more words that data, and include graphs and charts in color. They make perfect handouts for libraries, city and county government agencies, economic development agencies, and tribal governments.

One thing to remember about ACS: although a few new questions will appear in most new ACS surveys, the core of questions that it asks tends to remain the same, with its questions being tweaked only as needed. These are the questions that were asked before in the long form of the Census and were published as

Summary Files 3 and 4 in the 2000 Census. What's new about ACS is that now we know what its Margins of Error are—the Margins of Error for 2000's SF 3 and SF4 weren't published with the data, and now this data is published every year instead of every ten years.

Want to know how many ACS forms that were mailed out were returned? How completely the returned ACS questionnaires were filled out? How complete the survey coverage was by state? Look at the "Sample Size and Data Quality" web page -

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/sample_size_and_data_quality/

My guide to using the American Community Survey –

<http://www.odl.state.ok.us/usinfo/pubs/Census-Guide-to-ACS.pdf>

TO RECALCULATE ACS CONFIDENCE INTERVALS

Steve Barker at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Oklahoma State Data Center Lead Agency, has created an online tool that will let customers recalculate a confidence interval in ACS data from the official 90% to 95% or 99%. This tool also helps you add ACS estimates together and other operations.

<http://www.okcommerce.gov/Data-And-Research/Demographic-And-Population-Data>

Click on the link for "ACS Calculator"

USING DIFFERENT DATA SOURCES IN THE SAME REPORT

Minimize doing this if you can, but if you must the key to using Decennial Census data with American Community Survey data with Annual Population Estimates data is to properly cite it. This guide, **Mixing Census Data Types Together**, will tell you how to safely mix types of Census data. But even if you mix them as this guide can tell you how to do, don't merge them!

<http://www.odl.state.ok.us/usinfo/pubs/Census-Best-Practices.pdf>

Steve Beleu, Regional Depository Librarian, Oklahoma Dept. of Libraries
Director, Oklahoma State Data Center Coordinating Agency

March 13, 2012

Send questions to sbeleu@oltn.odl.state.ok.us