

The New American FactFinder and Library Reference Service

One thing that has emerged from working with the new American FactFinder search engine to access 2010 Decennial Census data, Annual Population Estimates data, and soon American Community Survey (ACS) data and the 2007 Economic Census, is that we librarians cannot give answers to Census data questions as we have done in the past for this reason: there is no longer one correct answer but multiple correct answers depending on what our library customers are using the data for. Census data users should decide for themselves which datasets meet their needs. Examples: if they are tracking societal trends, their choice should be ACS 1-year data; if they want the most accurate updates to the Decennial Census, their choice should be ACS 5-year data. As librarians our job is to train our users about 1. how to use the new American FactFinder, and 2. which datasets exist that can answer their questions. For us to give *just one* right answer as we have done in the past isn't good service, and may result in our library customers using good data badly.

The paradigm for Census data began changing with the advent of American Community Survey, and completely changed with the new American FactFinder. This means that the paradigm for Census data during this current decade has changed. We will all need to think about how we provide customer service for Census data.

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