

# Using the U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder

The **American FactFinder** is a resource for demographic, economic, social, housing information for over 7,000 different geographic areas nationwide. The information stems from various Census Bureau datasets.

One source is the [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#), an annual survey which fills gaps between decennial census years. ACS data is made available as estimates for various timeframes. For help in deciding the best timeframe for your search, read the following descriptions:

- ACS *one-year estimates* can provide data for areas with **populations of 65,000** or more. The most localized geographies for one-year estimates are Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). Here is an [explanation and listing of Chicago PUMAs](#).
- ACS *three-year estimates* can provide data for areas with a **population of 20,000** or more.
- ACS *five-year estimates* can provide data for areas as small as **census tracts and block groups**. For five-year estimates it is possible to obtain data by census tract. Use the Census Bureau's [Address Search](#) to figure out census tracts based on addresses.

*Note:* When selecting your timeframe, remember that a larger timeframe will provide more reliable data. This is especially important when working with smaller geographic areas.

## Finding Data:

There are numerous paths to data, and no one path is perfect for every situation. However, in most cases one must start by making two decisions:

What [topic measure](#) is of interest (e.g. poverty rate, employment rate, etc.)?

What [geography](#) is of interest (e.g. state, city, block, etc.)?

To begin, [go to FactFinder](#). Using “search options” on the left side of the page, click the [topic tab](#).

1. A listing of all data categories will pop-up.
2. Click a category to find subcategories to pop-up (e.g. ‘employment’ under ‘people’).
3. Click a subcategory to bring up related indicators (e.g. *employment status*)
4. Click an indicator to move it into “Your Selections” box in the top left corner of page. Once an indicator is selected, close the subcategories box by clicking the top right corner.

To narrow your analysis to a specific geographic area, click on the [geography tab](#) (below topic tab).

1. A new window, with various “Geography Types”, will appear.
2. Under the initial “geography type” choose the level at which you wish to end. Additional filters will pop-up as necessary (e.g. if ‘county’ is selected a filter will appear for you to select the ‘state’).
3. Once you find the geography that best fits your needs, click the “add to your selections” button at the bottom of the pop-up window. Only datasets including information from the selected geography will be available in your search results.

*Note:* Data is available at various geographic levels on FactFinder. The major levels are national, regional, state, and county – though each breaks down into subdivisions such as zip code, metropolitan statistical areas, and public use microdata areas. Choose carefully, as geography will affect the datasets you can use (e.g. American Community Survey), as well as how current and precise the data will be.

Once you have selected a topic and a geography, click on the hyperlinks in your search results to pull up datasets with the information you are seeking!