

Participatory Budgeting (PB) Evaluation Tip Sheet 1:

Comparing Demographic Data Collected Through Surveys in U.S. PB sites to Local U.S. Census Demographics

This tip sheet summarizes a few things to keep in mind when preparing local census data for comparisons with demographic data collected from PB participant survey respondents.

Evaluation surveys of PB participants, including those in *15 Key Metrics for Evaluating Participatory Budgeting: A Toolkit for Evaluators and Implementers* (the "PB Evaluation Toolkit"), ask participants about five demographic characteristics that can be compared to local census demographics: *age, sex, education, annual household income* and *race/ethnicity*.

Comparing the demographic profile of PB participant survey respondents to local Decennial Census/American Community Survey (ACS) data helps to understand how representative this group of PB participants is of their local population and to inform outreach efforts in later stages or future cycles of the PB process. In the absence of demographic information about participants who did not complete participant surveys, however, such comparison are also unavoidably limited to survey respondents and cannot easily be generalized to PB participants overall.

Public Agenda's research team can assist local PB evaluators who are interested in conducting the kinds of comparisons described here. We will update this tip sheet with new information over time. Please contact us if you would like assistance, have questions about these recommendations or want to share additional tips on the topics covered here - directly or by emailing research@publicagenda.org.

OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

Exclude non-response or “don’t know” responses from PB participant survey data when comparing this data to census data (i.e, calculate percentages only for those that gave responses to the questions). This is important as the census data does not include a non-response or “don’t know” category.

Short summary of the differences between the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey:

The Decennial Census collects data on every household in the United States every 10 years. The census collects a total population count, as well as age, gender, race and ethnicity, and homeownership. The benefits of census data are the large sample size and accuracy. The drawbacks are the lack of currency and the limited questions. Read more about census data here: <http://www.census.gov/2010census/about/>

The American Community Survey (ACS) collects more data more frequently than the census, but on a smaller sample of households (and is therefore an “estimate”). The ACS collects data every year on a small sample of households in most jurisdictions, and every 5 years on a larger sample of households in all jurisdictions. It collects the same information as the census, as well educational attainment, annual household income, employment, immigration status, and more. The benefits are the currency of the data and the additional topics. The drawbacks are the smaller sample size and decreased accuracy. Read more about when to use ACS data here: <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/estimates.html>

AGE

- Recalculate census demographics only for age groups that most closely match those eligible to participate in the local PB process and exclude younger age groups.
- Make sure recalculated age brackets add up to 100 percent.

The census and the ACS collect data on residents’ age, and typically combine them into 5-year brackets. For instance: Under 5 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, etc., until 85 to 89 years and 90 years and over.

The PB participation surveys that have most commonly been used by PB evaluators, and those included in the PB Evaluation Toolkit, ask participants about their age with response categories that are comparable to those used by the census/ACS, or ask age as an open-ended question.

To compare PB survey respondents’ age distribution to that of the local population, the census/ACS data needs to be pulled or recalculated to exclude age groups that weren’t eligible to participate in the PB process. For example, if a PB process allows ages 14 and above to participate in the process, then only census data for the population age 14 and above (or the closest approximation available through the census/ACS data) should be considered such that the percentages of each age category reflect the proportion of people in this category out of the population age 14 and above.

One way to check that the resulting census percentages are correct is to add them up across all age categories. The sum needs to total 100 percent.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- Limit comparisons to those 25 years and older.
- Conduct separate comparisons for 18-24 year olds.

The ACS collects data on residents' educational attainment in distinct ways for a) residents 15 years and older and b) for 18-24 year olds.

ACS education data for residents 25 years and older is most relevant for comparisons to PB participant survey respondents. For this age group, the ACS reports educational attainment along the following categories: Less than 9th grade; 9th to 12th grade, no diploma; High school graduate (includes equivalency); Some college, no degree; Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Graduate or professional degree.

The PB participation surveys that have most commonly been used by PB evaluators, and those included in the PB Evaluation Toolkit, ask participants about their educational attainment with response categories that are comparable to those used by the ACS. It is therefore important to also restrict PB participant survey data to participants age 25 or older when comparing education levels from PB participant surveys (or other possible sources) to the census.

If evaluators are also interested in comparing the education attainment of PB participant survey respondents ages 18-24 to ACS data, these comparisons should be done separately from those of the older age groups. The ACS reports educational attainment data for the population age 18-24 along only four categories: Less than high school graduate, High school graduate (includes equivalency), Some college or associate's degree, and Bachelor's degree or higher.

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

- Keep in mind that PB participant surveys yield household income data per individual while the census reports this data on the household level.

The ACS collects data on resident annual household using the following income brackets: Less than \$10,000; \$10,000 to \$14,999; \$15,000 to \$24,999; \$25,000 to \$34,999; \$35,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 to \$149,999; \$150,000 to \$199,999; \$200,000 or more.

The PB participation surveys that have most commonly been used by PB evaluators, and those included in the PB Evaluation Toolkit, ask participants about their annual household income from the past calendar year with response categories that are comparable to those used by the ACS.

ACS summary reports present income data on the household level, e.g., 10% of households in a given district or city had an annual income under \$10,000. PB participant surveys, however, generate this data on the level of individual participant survey respondents, e.g., 12% of survey respondents report an annual household income of under \$10,000. As PB participant surveys do not capture participation by household, income comparisons between these two data sources will not be a perfect match. Nevertheless, in the absence of other data sources or methods, these comparisons have been informative in past PB evaluations as they highlight general trends in the representativeness of PB survey respondents as compared to their local population.

RACE/ETHNICITY

- Use the “Hispanic or Latino and Race” table from the Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics census summary report for race/ethnicity comparisons
- Keep in mind that PB participant surveys usually ask participants to “check all that apply” on race/ethnicity questions, while the census provides this data in mutually exclusive categories.

The census and the ACS collect data on both race and Hispanic or Latino origin. Census/ACS summary reports present race alone, Hispanic or Latino origin alone, or race and Hispanic or Latino origin combined.

The PB participation surveys that have most commonly been used by PB evaluators, and those included in the PB Evaluation Toolkit, ask participants about their race and Hispanic or Latino origin combined, and are therefore comparable to the latter type of census/ACS summary reports.

We have found the “Hispanic or Latino and Race” table from the Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics census summary report most helpful, which distinguishes between Hispanic or Latino (of any race) and Not Hispanic or Latino (of any race). Hispanic or Latino can be compared directly to the PB participant survey category “Hispanic or Latino/a.” The other PB participant survey categories can be compared to the sub-categories under Not Hispanic or Latino, which are the following: White alone, Black alone, American Indian/Alaska Native alone, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, Some other race alone, Two or more races alone.

Note, that PB participant surveys allow participants to select more than one race/ethnicity, while the Census and ACS report race and ethnicity data in mutually exclusive categories. Comparisons between these two data sources will therefore not be a perfect match. Moreover, these comparisons could technically be biased as the census and ACS data include all residents, including those too young to vote in PB. The comparisons we describe here thus assume that race/ethnicity distributions are approximately the same across the youngest residents and everyone else – which may or may not be the case.

Notwithstanding these two caveats, these comparisons have been informative in previous PB evaluations as they highlight general trends in the representativeness of PB survey respondents as compared to their local population.

GENDER

- PB participant surveys that offer response categories other than male and female can still be compared to census data that is limited to two gender categories.

Census and ACS data on residents' gender is limited by offering only male and female as gender categories.

The PB participation surveys that have most commonly been used by PB evaluators, and those included in the PB Evaluation Toolkit, offer at least three response categories, including an option for participants to indicate identification with a different gender identity than male or female.

The two data sources can still be compared. If the proportion of PB participant survey respondents who report identifying with a gender category other than male or female is small (e.g. less than 2 percent), as it has been in recent evaluations, the male and female proportions can still be directly compared to the census/ACS data. If the proportion of respondents who report identifying with a gender category other than male or female gets larger, evaluators should recalculate the proportion of male and female respondents among their survey participants by excluding respondents who identify with another gender category – before comparing gender demographics to the local census. This means recalculating the data such that the percent of male and female respondents is out of only those respondents who identify as one or the other.

One way to check that the resulting percentages for each gender category for PB participant survey respondents are correct is to add them up across the two categories. The sum needs to total 100 percent.

Finally, note that technically the resulting comparisons might be somewhat biased as the census data and ACS data include all residents, including those too young to vote in PB. The comparisons we describe here thus assume that gender distributions are approximately the same across the youngest residents and everyone else.