

Census 2010 Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP)  
Census Bureau Input on Census Tracts and Block Groups

**Overview**

- In creating the 2010 PSAP plan, MAG and MAG member agencies will review and update census tracts, block groups, Census Designated Places (CDPs) and Census County Divisions (CCDs) to accommodate population and/or housing changes in their communities and to meet the 2010 PSAP criteria.
- According to the US Census Bureau, the American Community Survey (ACS) will replace the census long form for Census 2010.
- According to the Federal Register, Page 13831:
  - the ACS sample size will be smaller than the census long form sample.
  - as a general rule, the sample data for smaller population geographies will likely be less reliable than the sample data for geographies with larger population.
- The Census Bureau may restrict the availability of data for geographic areas with small populations.
- The Census Bureau has provided minimum, maximum, and optimum population and housing unit thresholds for updating census tracts, See Table 1.
- The Census Bureau has provided minimum and maximum population and housing unit thresholds for updating block groups, See Table 1.

Table 1: Census Bureau Criteria for Census Tracts and Block Groups						
	Population			Housing Units		
	Minimum	Maximum	Optimum	Minimum	Maximum	Optimum
Census Tracts	1,200	8,000	4,000	480	3,200	1,600
Block Groups	600	3,000	none	240	1,200	none

**Census Bureau Input on Census Tracts (From Federal Register/Vol.73, No. 51/Friday, March 14, 2008/ Notices, Pages 13836-13844)**

General Principles

- The Census Bureau requests that where a census tract must be updated, for example to meet the minimum or maximum population or housing unit thresholds, that the outer boundaries of the tract not be changed, but rather that a tract be split into two or more tracts, or merged with an adjacent tract.
- Aiming to create census tracts that meet the optimal population of 4,000 and maintaining minimum thresholds will improve the reliability and availability of data.
- Each census tract must encompass at least 1,200 people or at least 480 housing units unless it is flagged as a special land use tract, or is coextensive with a county with fewer than 1,200 people.
- Any census tract with a population or housing unit count less than the minimum threshold should be merged with an adjacent census tract to form a single tract with at least 1,200 people or at least 480 housing units.
- Optimally, census tracts should have 4,000 people or 1,600 housing units.
- Special land use tracts must be designated as a specific type of land use (e.g., state park, municipal park) and have an official name, generally have little or no residential population or housing units, and must not create a noncontiguous census tract. If located in a densely populated urban area, a special land use tract must have an area measurement of approximately 1 square mile or more. If delineated completely outside an urban area, a special land use tract must have an area of approximately 10 square miles or more.
- Merge, split, or redefine census tracts to avoid unnecessarily splitting American Indian reservations and off-reservation trust lands.

Criteria for Reviewing, Updating, Delineating 2010 Census Tracts

- Census tracts must not cross state or county boundaries.
- A census tract must cover the entire land and water area of a county.
- A census tract must comprise a reasonably compact and contiguous land area.
- Census tract boundaries should follow visible and identifiable features.

Preferred Features for Census Tract Boundaries for the 2010 Census

- State and county boundaries must always be census tract boundaries.
- American Indian reservation and off-reservation trust land boundaries.
- Visible, perennial natural and cultural features, such as roads, shorelines, rivers, perennial streams and canals, railroad tracks, or above-ground high-tension power lines.
- Boundaries of legal and administrative entities in selected states.
- When acceptable visible and governmental boundary features are not available for use as tract boundaries, the Census Bureau may, at its discretion, approve other nonstandard visible features, such as ridgelines, aboveground pipelines, intermittent streams, or fence lines. The Census Bureau may also accept, on a case-by-case basis, the boundaries of selected nonstandard and potentially nonvisible features, such as the boundaries of military installations, national parks, national monuments, national forests, other types of parks or forests,

- airports, marine ports, cemeteries, golf courses, penitentiaries/ prisons, or glaciers, or the straight-line extensions of visible features and other lines-of-sight.
- The boundaries of parks, forests, large airports, and military installations, provided the boundaries are clearly marked or easily recognized.

Population, Housing Unit, and Area Measurement Thresholds

- Population counts should be used in most cases, to review and update census tracts.
- Housing unit counts should be used for seasonal communities that have no or low population on census day (April 1).
- Locally produced population and housing unit estimates can be used when reviewing and updating tracts, especially in areas that have experienced considerable growth since Census 2000.
- The housing unit thresholds are based on a national average of 2.5 persons per household. The Census Bureau recognizes that there are regional variations to this average and will take this into consideration when reviewing all tract proposals.
- The Census Bureau recognizes the tension that exists between meeting the optimum population or housing unit threshold in a tract and maintaining tract comparability over time.
- For the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau allows the delineation of special land use tracts.
- The Census Bureau may waive the maximum population and housing unit thresholds as required to achieve the objectives of the Federal Register notice.

[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010\\_main.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010_main.html)

**Census Bureau Input on Block Groups (From Federal Register/Vol.73, No. 51/Friday, March 14, 2008/ Notices, Pages 13829-13836)**

General Principles

- Each block group must encompass at least 600 people or at least 240 housing units unless it is coextensive with a flagged special land use tract, or is coextensive with a county with fewer than 600 people. Any block group with a population or housing unit count less than the minimum threshold should be updated to meet or exceed the minimum threshold.
- The use of housing unit counts accommodates seasonal communities in which residents often are not present on the date of the decennial census.
- Special land use block groups must be designated as a specific type of land use (e.g., state park, municipal park) and have an official name, generally have little or no residential population or housing units, and must not create a noncontiguous block group. If located in a densely populated urban area, a special land use block group must have an area measurement of approximately one square mile or more. If delineated completely outside an urban area, a special land use block group must have an area of approximately 10 square miles or more.

Block Group Criteria for the 2010 Census

- Block groups must not cross census tract boundaries.
- Block groups must cover the entire land and water area of each census tract.
- A block group must comprise a reasonable compact, contiguous land area.
- Block group boundaries should follow visible and identifiable features.

Preferred Features for Block Group Boundaries for the 2010 Census

- State, county, and census tract boundaries must always be block group boundaries. This criterion takes precedence over all other boundary criteria or requirements.
- American Indian reservation and off-reservation trust land boundaries.
- Visible, perennial natural and cultural features, such as roads, shorelines, rivers, perennial streams and canals, railroad tracks, or above-ground high-tension power lines.
- Boundaries of legal and administrative entities in selected states.
- When acceptable visible and governmental boundary features are not available for use as block group boundaries, the Census Bureau may, at its discretion, approve other nonstandard visible features, such as ridge lines, above-ground pipelines, intermittent streams, or fence lines. The Census Bureau may also accept, on a case-by-case basis, the boundaries of selected nonstandard and potentially nonvisible features, such as the boundaries of military installations, National Parks, National Monuments, National Forests, other types of parks or forests, airports, marine ports, cemeteries, golf courses, penitentiaries/ prisons, glaciers, or the straight-line extensions of visible features and other lines-of-sight.

Population, Housing Unit, and Area Measurement Thresholds

- Locally produced population and housing unit estimates can be used when reviewing and updating block groups, especially in areas that have experienced considerable growth since Census 2000.
- Housing unit counts should be used for block groups in seasonal communities that have no or low population on census day (April 1).
- The housing unit thresholds are based on a national average of 2.5 people per household. The Census Bureau recognizes that there are regional variations to this average, and will take this into consideration when reviewing all census block group proposals.
- For the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau will allow the delineation of special land use census tracts, and special land use block groups will be created coextensive with these special land use tracts. A special land use tract, and hence a special land use block group, must be designated as a specific land use type (e.g., state park), must have an official name (e.g., Jay Cooke State Park), have little or no residential population or meet population or housing unit thresholds, and must not create a noncontiguous tract/block group.

[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010\\_main.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010_main.html)