Special Information for Requests for Census Block and Block-Group Data

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I. Research Plan Requirements for Obtaining PSID Geospatial Data

Starting with the PSID 2007 wave of data collection, there are three levels of PSID geospatial data currently available that users may request with evidence of an appropriate research and data security protection plan, in order of descending precision: Census Tract, Block Group, and Census Block. As described below, Census Block is the smallest level of data made available by PSID. Several Blocks make up Block Groups, which in turn make up Census Tracts. Because of its precision, the U.S. Census makes available relatively limited data at the Census Block level. Thus, while it is the smallest and most precise geospatial indicator, its usefulness may be limited.

Researchers who request these data must provide a research plan describing the analytic use of these data. *Because of the small level of precision of Block group and Census Block, researchers who request either of these variables must additionally provide an explicit and detailed justification for exactly how and why the research will benefit from having the PSID *Block* identifiers OR *Block Group* identifiers above and beyond *Tract* identifiers. For example, if the goal of the study is to examine contextual effects on individual outcomes by merging contextual data from the Census to the PSID, this particular contextual data itself needs to be measured at the Block or Block-Group level, and must be specified. If it is not measured at the Block or Block-Group level, then access to the PSID Block or Block Group data - above and beyond Tract data – may not be warranted. In your statement, please describe the data to which the PSID Block or Block-Group will be merged.*

The descriptions below provide information about the specific data available from the Census at the level of block and block group that may be used in conjunction with PSID Block and Block Group.

II. General Information about Census Block, Block Group, and Census Tract

Census Block

A Census Block is the smallest geographic unit used by the United States Census Bureau for tabulation of 100-percent data (data collected from all houses, rather than a sample of houses). Several blocks make up Block Groups, which again make up Census Tracts. There are on average about 39 blocks per Block group, but there are variations. Blocks typically have a four-digit number where the first number indicates which Block group the Block is in, for example Block 3019 would be in Block group 3. The number of blocks in the United States including Puerto Rico is about 8,200,000.

Blocks are typically bounded by streets, roads or creeks. In cities a Census Block may correspond to a city block, but in rural areas where roads are fewer, blocks may be limited by other features. Census Blocks covering the entire country were introduced with the 1990 Census. Prior to this, back to the 1940 Census, only select areas were divided into blocks.

Because particular Census Blocks may consist of small populations, the Census makes available relatively few variables to which Census Block can be linked. Only population and housing characteristic estimates at the Census Block level from the Census Short Form can be used in conjunction with Census Block.

A private vendor, Geolytics, has made the Census Short Form data available at the Block level and provides a list here:

http://www.geolytics.com/USCensus,Block-Estimates,Data,Variables,Products.asp

Block Group (BG)

A higher level of geography than Census Block is the statistical subdivision of a Census Tract (or, prior to Census 2000, a block numbering area) called Block Group (BG). A BG consists of all tabulation blocks whose numbers begin with the same digit in a Census Tract. For example, for Census 2000, BG 3 within a Census Tract includes all blocks numbered from 3000 to 3999. (A few BGs consist of a single block.) BGs generally contain between 300 and 3,000 people, with an optimum size of 1,500 people. While at a higher level of detail than Census Block, the BG is the lowest-level geographic entity for which the U.S. Census Bureau tabulates sample data from a decennial census.

Block Group can be linked to Block Group-level estimates available from the Census Long Form (2000) from private vendors such as Geolytics (http://www.geolytics.com/USCensus,Census-2000-Long-Form,Products.asp) who can provide a dataset containing 5,500 variables estimated at the Block Group level such as income, housing, employment, language spoken, ancestry, education, poverty, rent, mortgage, commute to work, etc.

Census Tract

A small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county or statistically equivalent entity, delineated for data presentation purposes by a local group of census data users or the geographic staff of a regional census center in accordance with U.S. Census Bureau guidelines. Designed to be relatively homogeneous units with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions at the time they are established, Census Tracts generally contain between 1,000 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Census Tract boundaries are delineated with the intention of being stable over many decades, so they generally follow relatively permanent visible features. However, they may follow governmental unit boundaries and other invisible features in some instances; the boundary of a state or county (or statistically equivalent entity) is always a Census Tract boundary. When data are provided for American Indian entities, the boundary of a federally recognized American Indian reservation and off-reservation trust land is always the boundary of a tribal Census Tract. See block numbering area, tribal Census Tract.

More than 10,000 estimates at the Census Tract level are available from the Census Long Form. Geolytics provides a description here:
http://www.geolytics.com/USCensus,Census-2000-Long-Form,Products.asp

Note: Researchers who obtain these data will also obtain the higher levels of geocode data available in the PSID, including county, zipcode, and MSA as well as other variables.