

# THE COLUMN

Newsletter of  
the Virginia Institute  
of Government

Fall/Winter 2008



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## Understanding and Using the New Census

*The American Community Survey provides a new approach for collecting up-to-date local data*

QIAN CAI

For decades, local governments have relied on decennial census data when making planning decisions, such as where to build new roads and schools or how to provide services for needy segments of the population. Beginning in 2010, the decennial census will be changed. This article provides an overview of the changes ahead, what you should know about the data, and resources to help you continue to develop your expertise in using census data in local planning.

### THE DECENNIAL CENSUS: A CHANGING TRADITION

Most detailed demographic and socioeconomic information currently in use was gathered from the decennial census "long form," which was sent to one in every six households in 2000. During that census, all other households (not among the one in six receiv-

ing the long form) were sent a "short form," which asked only a few questions about each household member: name, sex, age, date of birth, race, ethnicity, relationship, and housing tenure. The long form was used to obtain detailed data on communities throughout the country. The short form was used to collect the basic information required to fulfill the constitutionally mandated purpose of a decennial census: to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and redistrict state legislatures.

Beginning in 2010, the decennial census will be different. Instead of using a long and a short form, the 2010 Census, and every decennial census thereafter, will have a short form only. The short form will be sent to every household and will collect the same basic information detailed above. The census long form has been replaced by the annual American Community Survey (ACS).

### NEW ANNUAL DATA FROM THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

The American Community Survey, once fully implemented, will provide communities with detailed demographic, socioeconomic, and housing characteristics every year, instead of

*continued on page 2*



***“The American Community Survey meets a critical need for timely information. ... 10 years is too long to wait for detailed census data. These data are vital for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies ranging from building new schools and roads to establishing initiatives that drive economic development.”***

LOUIS KINCANNON  
FORMER DIRECTOR  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

***“As the staff demographer, I am excited about the prospect of using the ACS, and look forward to having our County [James City County] included.”***

DAVID W. GERMAN, AICP  
SENIOR PLANNER  
JAMES CITY COUNTY  
PLANNING DIVISION  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT  
DEPARTMENT

*continued from page 1*

once every 10 years. The survey addresses many questions, such as what is our community's median household income; how many persons speak a language other than English at home; and what do we know about community residents moving from elsewhere.

The Census Bureau began testing the ACS in 1996. Since 2006, the Bureau has published single-year nationwide ACS data for all areas with populations of 65,000 or more. In Virginia, that includes the state, 11 congressional districts, 11 metropolitan areas, two micropolitan areas, 17 counties and 11 cities.

Areas with populations fewer than 65,000 require the use of multiyear averages to reach an appropriate sample size, so ACS data for these smaller communities is being released over time as larger sample sizes are realized. In December 2008, the Census Bureau will release three-year estimates for areas with populations greater than 20,000. In 2010, the Bureau will release five-year estimates for communities with populations smaller than 20,000. After 2010, ACS estimates for each community will be updated annually using data from one-, three-, or five-year intervals.

#### **BEING AN INFORMED CONSUMER OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY**

In anticipation of the 2010 Decennial Census—the first to include the ACS—you should keep in mind some key aspects of the data:

1. First, the ACS is a *survey* of the population, not a census. This means that data about your community, such as the number of adults age 25 and over without a high school diploma, is an estimate based on a survey questionnaire sent to a sample of the population.

The Census Bureau uses its annual population and housing estimates to statistically control the sample population and housing totals; so the accuracy of the ACS largely depends on the accuracy of the Bureau's annual population and housing estimates. Recently, the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service was among five organizations nationwide awarded a contract by the Bureau to study and improve that agency's annual population estimates. More accurate Census Bureau population estimates yield more accurate ACS results.

2. Sampling error is another important factor to consider when interpreting or using ACS information. When estimates of any popula-

tion characteristic, such as educational attainment, are based on a sample of the population, the estimates may not reflect the true value of the entire population. Therefore, ACS data are reported with a margin of error for each data element.

You can account for sampling error associated with the data by using the reported margin of error information. For example, according to the 2006 ACS, the median age of Richmond City's population was 35.4, with a margin of error of +/- 0.2 years. This means that the Census Bureau is 90 percent certain that the true median age of the Richmond City population is between 35.2 and 35.6. The smaller the margin of error, the more precise the estimate.

#### **RESOURCES TO HELP YOU USE THE NEW CENSUS DATA**

While the annual ACS provides a wealth of valuable information, the sheer volume of data that is available can be overwhelming. The best way to access the ACS data is through the Census Bureau's American FactFinder® website at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

To find your community data quickly, enter your city/town, county, zip code, and state at the top of the webpage. This will bring up a Fact Sheet providing a basic overview of the data for your community. Information is also provided in several other formats, including data profiles, ranking tables, subject tables, geographic comparison tables, and detail tables. In addition, the Census Bureau's website offers help in understanding and interpreting data through such publications as the *Guide to ACS Data Products* and *Data Users Handbook* ([www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)).

The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service demographics and workforce staff are engaged in research involving the ACS and other resources to improve government planning and services in Virginia. Upon request, we will be happy to offer workshops to help you become more skillful in using the new census data.



*The author is director of the Demographics & Workforce Section at UVa's Cooper Center for Public Service. Contact her at 434/982-5581 or [qian.cai@virginia.edu](mailto:qian.cai@virginia.edu) or visit <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/>.*

## KUDOS for CSS

*“Having ready access to up-to-date data on salaries and benefits saves me time and money.”*

NANCY L. BOWMAN  
HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR  
CITY OF STAUNTON

*“CSS ... has reduced our workload. Rather than respond to individual surveys from other localities, we just refer them to CSS.”*

CAROL LUCKAM  
HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR  
JAMES CITY COUNTY

## Kudos for EBIS

*“We love your service! It provides information that simply cannot be found anywhere.”*

STAFF  
MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT  
INFORMATION CENTER (MAGIC)  
PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

*“EBIS, our invisible staff member, provides pertinent, impartial, and timely responses to research our questions.”*

PETE HUBER  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
COUNTY OF PULASKI

## VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

### Email Broadcast Information System (EBIS)

*Questions reflect today's realities*

The Institute's popular electronic service—EBIS—deals regularly with the hot topics of the time. This year, to no one's surprise, that topic is the economic downturn and operating cost increases, and their impacts on local governmental finances.

EBIS, now in its 11th year of operation, responds to several hundred member requests each year. All new topics and the resulting responses are catalogued in a database, which now contains over 2,775 topics.

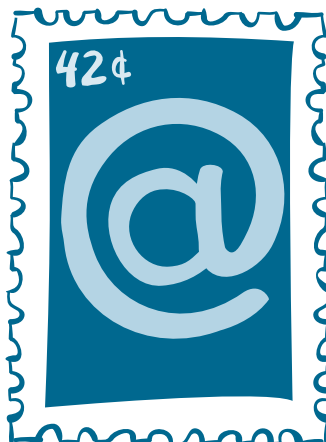
Here are some sample topics handled since the second quarter of 2008:

- budget-cut options—State Department of Planning & Budget—option selected
- workday—non-public safety personnel—shifting to 4 days at 10 hours per day
- travel—elected officials—deciding who attends which event/program
- telecommuting policies—2008
- vehicle allowances—increased to reflect fuel costs
- Fund balance—unreserved/undesignated—formula for calculating

What are your “hot topics”? If you are an Institute member, EBIS may have the answers. Please feel free to contact the Institute when we can be of assistance.

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Contact Tedd Povar at 804/371-0202 or [tep3e@virginia.edu](mailto:tep3e@virginia.edu).



## CSS

*System proves valuable to subscribers*

The 130+ subscribers to the Institute's Compensation Survey System (CSS) continue to enjoy 24/7 online access to pay and benefit information. By belonging to CSS they receive

- Virginia information for Virginia localities
- over 600 job titles—that can be sorted by title and locality
- benefit information, including medical insurance, leave allocations, retirement programs, and disability programs
- info on general employees and elected officials
- reports that can be customized and printed
- low annual subscription fees with discounts for Institute members

We encourage subscribers to enter and update their salary and benefit information now that the FY 2009 budgets have been finalized. Please remember that across-the-board cost-of-living adjustments can be made to your data by the system managers at Technology Net. There is no need for subscribers to spend time adjusting their data.

In an effort to interest school systems and other local agencies in joining CSS, the Institute is working with the program's developer, Technology Net, to expand the system to meet the special needs of the education community and other public service entities.

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Contact Tedd Povar at 804/371-0202 or [tep3e@virginia.edu](mailto:tep3e@virginia.edu).



**VIRGINIA  
INSTITUTE OF  
GOVERNMENT**

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Unless otherwise noted, articles are written by Institute staff. For additional information, contact Billie Easton.

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WELDON COOPER  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE  
University of Virginia

**VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS**

**SECOND WEDNESDAY  
SUPERVISOR SERIES**

*In partnership with Chesterfield County*

Classes are held at UVa's Richmond Center from 8:30 am–3:30 pm. Registration fee: \$100 per person. Lunch and materials included. Discount: for every three registrants from the same organization, the fourth person can attend at no cost (all registrations must be submitted together for the same class).

Contact Jessica Smith at 804/371-0202 or jessicasmith@virginia.edu, or visit [www.ValnstituteofGovernment.org](http://www.ValnstituteofGovernment.org).

**Strategic Planning**

OCTOBER 8, 2008

For supervisors, team leaders, managers or directors

**AFTER COMPLETING THIS SEMINAR, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO**

- analyze a strategic plan development/ deployment model
- define the components of strategic planning
- demonstrate how to develop good performance measures
- illustrate the relationship between a strategic plan, department performance plans, and the budget process

**Managing Conflict**

NOVEMBER 12, 2008

For supervisors, team leaders, managers, or directors

**THIS SEMINAR WILL HELP YOU TO**

- identify potential sources of conflict
- describe multiple styles of conflict management
- analyze various supervisory skills used in effective conflict resolution
- develop skills through practice and group activities

**COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WORKING TOGETHER**

The Institute has assisted several community colleges in offering classes for local government employees in their regions. If you think there is potential for a similar program in your community, contact Billie Easton at [bee2u@virginia.edu](mailto:bee2u@virginia.edu) or 804/371-0202.

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

**VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**Southwest Virginia Local Government Institute**

*Sponsored by the Center for Business and Industry at Virginia Highlands Community College in partnership with the Mount Rogers Planning District and the Virginia Institute of Government*

OCTOBER 28, 2008 • 7:45 am–4:30 pm

For local government elected and appointed officials and employees

**Morning Session**

- Emergency Preparedness
- How to Lead Effective Meetings, Part 1
- Public Relations

**Afternoon Session**

- Essentials of Local Government
- How to Lead Effective Meetings, Part 2
- Take the Step Up to Leadership: Getting Started as a New Leader

Contact Beth Duffield at (276) 739-2496 or [bduffield@vhcc.edu](mailto:bduffield@vhcc.edu).

**LORD FAIRFAX COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Lord Fairfax Community College is offering classes designed for local government employees in its service region (Northern Shenandoah/Rappahannock).

Fall classes are held at two Lord Fairfax CC campuses and the Luray Page County Center.

**Customer Service for the Public Employee**

8:30 am–12:30 pm

SEPTEMBER 19—Luray Page County Center

OCTOBER 17—Fauquier Campus

NOVEMBER 14—Middletown Campus

**Peer Today, Boss Tomorrow**

Noon–4 pm

SEPTEMBER 26—Middletown Campus

OCTOBER 17—Fauquier Campus

Contact Bill Pence at [bpence@lfcc.edu](mailto:bpence@lfcc.edu) or 540/868-7061. To download brochure, visit [www.lfccworkforce.com/schedule.cfm](http://www.lfccworkforce.com/schedule.cfm)

*“Local government employees’ needs are unique due to the relationship they have with their ‘customers.’”*  
**Lord Fairfax Community College has developed training opportunities for area localities in customer service, leadership, and ethics.**

**BILL PENCE**  
 COORDINATOR  
 BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY TRAINING  
 LORD FAIRFAX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*“The Local Government Academy gives our employees a chance for quality training, close to home, at reasonable prices. The courses are chosen by the localities involved, so they meet the needs of our employees.”*

**TAMMI ELLIS**  
 ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
 OF ADMINISTRATION  
 STAFFORD COUNTY

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACADEMIES

**Virginia Community Colleges are working with localities and the Virginia Institute of Government to provide professional development opportunities to local government officials and employees.**



### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

A Local Government Academy or Institute is a program of classes, offered by a community college, intended for employees and elected and appointed officials of localities in that college’s service region. These programs are sometimes called Local Government Academies or Local Government Institutes.

The structure of a Local Government Academy will vary depending on the needs of the locality(ies) involved. Here are some possible formats:

- an open-enrollment program offering several semester-long classes designed for all levels of employees from localities in a specific region;
- an open-enrollment, one-day seminar of morning and/or afternoon classes for employees and elected officials; or
- a one-day class offered at the request of a locality for selected employees.

Classes are held either at the college; onsite at a local government training facility; or at a regional educational center, like the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon.

### CONTENT FOCUS

A college’s Workforce Development or Business and Industry Center works with human resources directors and administrators of area local governments to determine the curriculum. The program’s focus can be diverse, covering core skills like customer service, supervising employees, and communication; leadership development; and specialized knowledge, such as emergency management and land-use regulations. Topics are selected based on the expressed needs of the localities.

### THE INSTITUTE’S ROLE

The Institute’s involvement can include participating in curriculum discussions; enlisting trainers who specialize in developing classes for and delivering training to local governments; acting as liaison between the community college and the locality; identifying sources to assist with content development; and providing general advice.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

At least four community colleges have held formalized local-employee development programs: Eastern Shore, Germanna, Lord Fairfax, and Virginia Highlands.

“Next to manufacturing, the largest employment segment in our service region is state and local government,” said Beth Duffield, workforce development coordinator for the Center for Business & Industry (CBI) at Virginia Highlands Community College. “We believe that great opportunities exist to provide training at a price and quality that only the community college system and partners, such as the Virginia Institute of Government and the Mount Rogers Planning District, can provide.”

CBI will hold its second Local Government Institute on October 28 in Abingdon. The first conference, which took place in June, was underwritten by an Institutes of Excellence Grant from the Virginia Community College System. “We hope to hold at least two Local Government Institutes each year,” said Duffield.

If the Virginia Institute of Government can help you connect with your local community college, please contact Billie Easton at 804/371-0202 or [bee2u@virginia.edu](mailto:bee2u@virginia.edu).

**UPCOMING**

**VIRGINIA INSTITUTE  
OF GOVERNMENT**

Second Wednesday  
Supervisor Series

Contact Jessica Smith at  
804/371-0202 or  
jessicasmith@virginia.edu



**VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Southwest Virginia Local  
Government Institute

Abingdon • Oct. 28  
Contact Beth Duffield  
bduffield@vhcc.edu  
or 276/739-2496



**LORD FAIRFAX  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Customer Service for the  
Public Employee

Peer Today, Boss Tomorrow  
Various dates and locations  
Contact Bill Pence at  
540/868-7061 or  
bpence@lfcc.edu

University of Virginia  
700 East Franklin Street, Suite 700  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2318



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**COOPER CENTER'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

If your locality is an Institute member, you can attend one of the Cooper Center's nationally recognized leadership programs at a **10% discount**.

**SEI (Senior Executive  
Institute)**

SEI is an annual, two-week residential program for senior local government managers. SEI is held at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

**SEI 2009 Schedule**  
July 19-31

Contact Melanie Gillies at  
434/982-5512 or mbg4b@virginia.edu.



**LEAD (Leading, Educating,  
and Developing program)**

LEAD is a one-week residential program for department/division heads and senior staff. LEAD is held at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

**LEAD 2009 Schedule**

January 18-23

March 8-13

May 31-June 5

August 23-28

October 11-16

November 8-13

December 6-11



Contact Carmie Rodriguez at  
434/243-5031 or carmie@virginia.edu.