

Census 2000: It Affects All of Us
Granite State Consumer
By: Charlie French

“Census 2000 is here, Census 2000 is here,” echoes the Paul Revere-like cry as new data emerges from the dark to leap upon the North American continent. And, it is arriving quicker than any Census ever has.

I hear the buzzword, *2000 Census*, used over the airwaves, in business meetings, and in just about every community that I visit. Everyone has a sense that it is important; but the fact is, most people have never used demographic and socioeconomic data, nor do they know how to obtain it.

Here’s some news, folks – we should care a whole lot more about the Census than we do! After all, the Census helps determine who gets federal aid, where new assistance programs will be targeted, what sorts of businesses move into a region, and how your vote counts in the Electoral College. In fact, socioeconomic and demographic data impact just about everything that you do – how far you travel to the store, what your tax rates will be, and what schools your children attend.

There are those out there who *do* realize the importance of demographic and socioeconomic data. That might explain why data provision has evolved into a huge industry with lots of money to be made by consultants. And because I often provide data and data analysis free of charge for municipalities, organizations and institutions, I get lots of requests. Small business owners want to know whom to market their products or services to. Colleges and universities want to project future student enrollment. Municipalities seek assistance calculating future sales tax revenue and often require maps and data to supplement comprehensive plans. Politicians even use data to locate their constituencies. Perhaps most important, communities use data to support grant proposals and other funding requests. All of these agencies, organizations, and businesses require data. Fortunately, obtaining data is now a whole lot easier than it was ten years ago due to the invention of the Internet.

Let’s take a look at what data is available from the Bureau of the Census website. An overview of the *2000 Census*, with links, can be found at www.census.gov. Associated Census sites, such as *American Factfinder* (<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet>) also contain 2000 demographic information on population, race, income, employment, education, and business in an easy-to-use format. Since the Bureau of the Census just completed the most comprehensive national census ever, their website is the best source for the above information. That’s not to say that the information is flawless: already errors have been spotted in the 2000 data and a portion of the data has still not been released. On the other hand, it’s the most comprehensive socioeconomic data source available.

For those who want maps to display information, the Bureau of the Census also maintains a site called Tiger Maps (<http://tiger.census.gov/>). This site allows you to create maps using demographic information at the state, county, municipal, census tract, and census block levels. The site even lets you create maps using both 1990 and available 2000 Census data.

Several other federal websites maintain demographic and socioeconomic information. The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintains information on employment and income (www.bls.gov), USDA maintains a site with statistical information pertaining to agriculture (www.usda.gov/nass), housing statistics can be found on HUD's website (www.hud.gov), and business and payroll data from County Business Patterns can be found at www.census.gov/epcd/cbp/view/cbpview.html.

There are also data resources at the regional and local levels. For example, the New Hampshire Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau maintains a community profiles page that allows communities to access detailed information on wages, infrastructure, tax rates, etc., at <http://www.nhes.state.nh.us/elmi/communpro.htm>. The State of New Hampshire, in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire, maintains the *Granit Database* (<http://www.granit.sr.unh.edu/>), which enables one to access maps and data on natural resource features. If health care is your field, you can find national and state level health-care statistics at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh.htm>. And if education is your passion, you can find national and state data on the US Department of Education's website at <http://www.ed.gov/topics/topicsTier2.jsp?top=Research+%26+Stats&type=T&subtop=Statistics>.

There are plenty of private data sources, too. Take, for example, <http://terraserver.homeadvisor.msn.com>. This website offers detailed satellite photographs of an area as small as a football field. In fact, using Terraserver's grid system, you can even locate your own residence if it was built before 1996.

All of these sites provide important data and information. In fact, you can find just about any data you that need on the Internet. Just be wary of possible errors and flaws in the data and always check the source. No single source is perfect – they are merely models that represent the actual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of a given population. Hence, the challenge to you is to let information providers know how you used their information. Also let them know how they can improve their sites. After all, in order to have a competitive advantage in today's world, we must be able to access and utilize information effectively.