

## Managing the Balancing Act: Administrative Records and the US Census Bureau

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Short 150-word abstract:

Vital to the U.S. Census Bureau's livelihood is the proper management, support, and use of administrative records data. To obtain and use these data, the Census Bureau must adhere to a number of regulatory requirements. In this paper, we describe the legal and policy requirements that relate to the acquisition, use, and protection of administrative records data; as well as discuss the concept of "Data Stewardship" at the Census Bureau. The "Data Stewardship" approach is designed to address the delicate balance between data access and respondent privacy and confidentiality. While the management of administrative records usage is complex, proper management leads to many rewards. Foremost, the Census Bureau's use of these data allows us to redefine the methods we use to develop statistics. Thus, the maintenance of administrative records data is not only our duty as civil servants; it is also in our best interest for excelling in future endeavors.

## Extended abstract:

Vital to the Census Bureau's livelihood is the proper management, support, and use of administrative records data. Administrative records data refers to microdata records contained in files collected and maintained by administrative or program agencies and commercial entities. These files are maintained for the purpose of administering programs and providing services. The primary sources of administrative records data used by the Census Bureau are the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Social Security Administration (SSA), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and state and local governments. To obtain these data, the Census Bureau must adhere to a number of regulatory requirements.

The benefits of using administrative records are far reaching. By accessing administrative records in conjunction with already existing research projects, we are able to maximize research potentials without the extra burden of creating, conducting, and analyzing a new survey. Using administrative records data reduces data collection costs, which tend to be quite hefty. Also, administrative records data reduce respondent burden. Thus, the use of administrative records data is more cost-effective as well as consumer-effective. Currently, various programs throughout the Census Bureau depend on administrative records for data production. Examples of such programs include the Intercensal Population Estimates by the Demographic Directorate and the development of the Business Register by the Economic Directorate.

In addition to the benefits of administrative records, their use also requires the Census Bureau to use caution and as such, the Census Bureau has developed policies to guide in their usage. Public concern for privacy and confidentiality have led to increased safeguarding and data protection measures within the Census Bureau. In this forum, a balancing act emerges in which we, as stewards of administrative records, must juggle the benefits of using administrative records with the task of maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

In order to facilitate this task, legal guidelines and policies have been implemented at the Census Bureau. These tools strive to ensure the successful management of administrative records data.

In order to properly acquire, manage, and use these data, legal requirements relating to administrative records data use and protection must be met. Several key documents provide the Census Bureau with both legal and ethical guidance. First and foremost is Title 13 United States Code (USC): the Census Bureau's legal authority for collecting, protecting and disseminating data. Title 13 provides the Census Bureau with broad authority to conduct economic and demographic censuses and surveys. It ensures that all projects deliver a benefit to the Census Bureau.

Additionally, the Privacy Act of 1974, the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988, the Uniform Trade Secrets Act of 1985 with amendments, and the E-Government Act of 2002 provide legal guidelines for the Census Bureau, and other federal agencies, to acquire, use, and maintain confidential data. The Privacy Act serves to prevent disclosure of personally identifiable records maintained by agencies. Similarly, the Paperwork Reduction Act mandates that agencies must inform respondents of the following: why the information is collected and what it is used for; whether giving the information is voluntary, mandatory or required to receive a benefit; and, the estimated response burden. In addition to the regulations described above, Title 26 of the USC specifies the use of Federal Tax Information, which has been authorized by the IRS for Census Bureau use. Finally, in addition to the legal requirements, the Census Bureau is also bound to the regulations imposed by the sponsor agency(s).

A central policy to the Census Bureau is the concept of data stewardship. Data stewardship refers to the process of balancing the need for statistical information with the legal and ethical obligation to respect individual privacy and protect confidentiality. The data stewardship construct can best be illustrated by imagining a scale with privacy and confidentiality on one side, while the need to provide users with quality data is delicately balanced on the other. A sound data stewardship structure within which such issues can be weighed, allows the Census Bureau to make informed decisions surrounding the programmatic use of administrative records. Through this balanced framework, the Census Bureau is able to move forward with our usage of administrative records while protecting confidentiality and privacy.

In this paper, we describe the legal and policy requirements that relate to the acquisition, use, and protection of administrative records data. It is our goal to educate others to the ongoing work of the Census Bureau and the care we take with the data. The management of administrative records may seem like a daunting task. However, the benefits that can be reaped from implementing these procedures far out-weigh the costs. Good management leads to the development of stronger data products by the Census Bureau, amicable relationships between the Census Bureau and its data providers, increased data sharing possibilities, and increased research opportunities for both internal and joint work. Thus, the maintenance of administrative records data is not only our duty as civil servants; it is also in our best interest for excelling in future endeavors.