

Census 2010 Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP)
Guidelines for Census Tracts and Block Groups

- 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 changes in their communities and to meet the 2010 PSAP criteria.
- The American Community Survey (ACS) will replace the census long form for Census 2010.
- The ACS sample size will be smaller than the census long form sample.
- 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.
- The Census Bureau has provided minimum and maximum population and housing unit thresholds for updating block groups, See Table 1.

	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

- MAG created the target population threshold for block groups by taking half of the maximum population threshold.
- MAG created the target housing unit threshold for block groups by taking half of the maximum housing unit threshold.
- To improve the reliability and availability of data, it is recommended to use the target threshold, See Table 2, to create block groups and census tracts.

	Target Population	Target Housing Units
Census Tracts	4,000	1,600
Block Groups	1,500	600

See also, Paper 1 on Supporting Documentation from the Federal Register, Table 3 on the Draft Criteria for 2010 PSAP Geographic Entities from the U.S. Census Bureau, Draft April 23, 2008, and Paper 2 an excerpt from the PSAP Participant Information document from the U.S. Census Bureau, Draft April 23, 2008.

POPTAC Recommendation Requested:

Use the recommended guidelines in the table above to create block groups and census tracts as close to the target population or housing units as possible for the Census 2010 PSAP.

PAPER 1Supporting Documentation from the Federal Register/ Vol. 73, No. 51/ Page 13831

The sample size for the ACS is smaller than the sample from the decennial census long form of previous censuses. As a general rule, estimates from programs providing sample data, including the ACS, for geographic areas with smaller populations will be subject to higher variances than comparable estimates for areas with larger populations (i.e., the sample data for smaller population geographies will likely be less reliable than the sample data for geographies with larger population). In addition, the Census Bureau's disclosure rules may have the effect of restricting the availability and amount of sample data published for geographic areas with small populations. Aiming to create block groups that fall between the minimum and maximum thresholds will improve the reliability and availability of data, and PSAP participants should consider these factors when defining their block groups.

TABLE 3		Primary purpose	Nationwide wall-to-wall coverage	Geography nests within	Census 2000 population criteria	Other criteria/ guidelines	Summary of changes to criteria for the 2010 Census The final criteria can be found at: http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010_main.html
Participant Statistical Areas	Census Tracts	Boundary continuity	Yes	County	Optimum: 4,000	Merge and split tracts to meet thresholds, not change	Lower the minimum threshold for most tracts. Minimum: 1,200 Maximum: 8,000 Optimum: 4,000
					Minimum: 1,500 (1,000 within AIRs)		Housing unit counts may be used to meet tract thresholds. Minimum: 480 Maximum: 3,200 Optimum: 1,600
					Maximum: 8,000		All types of populated tracts must meet the same thresholds.
					Wherever possible conform to American Indian reservations.		
					Special tracts may be created for large special land use areas without housing units or population (e.g., large public parks, forests).		
	Block Groups (BGs)	Small area, characteristics data	Yes	Census Tract	Optimum: 1,500	Smallest area for American Community Survey (ACS) sample data	Increase the minimum population threshold. Minimum: 600 Maximum: 3,000 Optimum: none
					Minimum: 600 (300 within AIRs)	Between 1 and 9 BGs nest within a census tract	Housing unit counts may be used to meet BG thresholds. Minimum: 240 Maximum: 1,200 Optimum: none
		Meet minimum thresholds			Maximum: 3,000	Census tract boundaries are always BG boundaries	All types of populated BGs must meet the same thresholds.
							Wherever possible conform to American Indian reservations. Special BGs may be created for large special land use areas without housing units or population (e.g., large public parks, forests).
	Census County Divisions (CCDs)	Set of subcounty units that have stable boundaries and recognizable names	CCDs and MCDs together	County	None	Usually represents one or more communities, trading centers, or major land uses	<i>No significant changes.</i>
CCDs exist in 22 states							
Census Designated Places (CDPs)	Place-level statistics for well - known, closely settled localities	No, CDPs capture distinct communities	State	None	Named community	A CDP cannot have zero population and zero housing units.	
	Mix of residential, commercial, and retail areas				Not part of an incorporated place or other CDP	A CDP must represent a single, distinct community. A CDP that represents multiple, distinct communities, and the hyphenated name typically assigned to represent such CDPs, will not be permitted. Exceptions will be made for communities whose identities have merged and in which both names commonly are used together.	
					Nucleus of relatively high residential population density		

These statistical areas are for statistical uses only. All comprise relatively compact, contiguous land areas

PAPER 2Pages 7-11 of the PSAP Participant Information document from the U.S. Census Bureau, Draft April 23, 2008

The complete final criteria for census tract, block group, CDP and CCD final criteria *Federal Register* notices are available on the 2010 PSAP website at:
http://www.census.gov/geo/www/psap2010/psap2010_main.html

For information about the history of the PSAP and PSAP geographic entities see Appendix B — PSAP History.

V. Information on PSAP geographic entities that need to be updated or revised for 2010

In creating the 2010 PSAP plan, PSAP participants review and update census tracts, block groups, CDPs and CCDs to accommodate changes in their communities and to meet the 2010 PSAP criteria. The following are the types of edits that should be executed by the PSAP participants to meet the 2010 PSAP criteria.

Note: To meet population and housing unit thresholds the Census Bureau provides 2000 population and housing unit counts. Other population and housing estimates may be used to meet thresholds and the use of estimates must be noted in the 2010 PSAP submission. Future growth may be considered, but should not extend beyond 2013 and should not be used to meet minimum thresholds.

Census Tracts**1. Above maximum**

- Split census tracts into two or more census tracts when the population and housing unit count is above the maximum thresholds. The maximum thresholds for census tracts are 8,000 for population and 3,200 for housing units.
- Since data comparability over time is paramount with census tracts, the outer boundary of a census tract should be maintained to facilitate data comparability over time. Therefore, above maximum census tracts should be split into one or more census tracts to meet thresholds while maintaining the outer boundary of the parent census tract.
- The PSAP MTPS flags all census tracts that are above the maximum thresholds and prompts the user to split those census tracts to meet the threshold.

2. Below minimum

- Merge census tracts with an adjacent census tract or census tracts when the population and housing unit count is below the minimum thresholds. Minimum thresholds for census tracts are 1,200 for population and 480 for housing units.
- Since data comparability over time is paramount with census tracts, the outer boundary of a census tract should be maintained to facilitate data comparability

over time. Therefore, below minimum census tracts should be merged to meet population and housing unit thresholds while maintaining the outer boundaries of the parent census tracts.

- The PSAP MTPS flags all census tracts that are below the minimum thresholds and prompts the user to merge those census tracts to meet the threshold.

3. Split AIR/ORTL/HHL

- Edit census tracts so that the American Indian reservations (AIRs), off-reservation trust lands (ORTL), and Hawaiian Home Lands (HHLs) are within as few census tracts as possible.
- All AIRs/ORTLs/HHLs should be within as few census tracts as possible, and each AIR, ORTL, or HHL with a population of 2,400 or less and a housing unit count of 960 or less should not be split by census tract boundaries. If possible, census tracts delineated to encompass AIRs/ORTLs/HHLs should have the majority of their area covered by AIRs/ORTLs/HHLs. The only circumstance where retracting, or completely changing the boundaries of the census tract (not by splitting or merging), is encouraged by the Census Bureau is where an AIR/ORTL/HHL is split unnecessarily by census tract boundaries. In order to edit these census tracts one can split, merge, or change the boundaries.
- The PSAP MTPS will flag all census tracts that split an AIR/ORTL/HHL and prompt the user to edit (split, merge, or boundary change) the census tracts so that they no longer split the AIR/ORTL/HHL if possible.

4. Special land use tract

- Special land use tracts may be designated to capture an area that has a specific and non-residential land use.
- An area designated as a special land use tract must have an official name (e.g., Jay Cooke State Park), must have little or no residential population or housing units, and must not create a noncontiguous tract. If delineated within a densely populated, urban area, a special land use tract must have an area of one square mile or more. If delineated outside an urban area, a special land use tract must have an area of 10 square miles or more. The area must be first split from the existing census tract(s) and the attribute information (e.g., land use type, official name) must be provided. When a special land use tract is delineated a special land use block group will be created coextensive with the special land use tract.
- The PSAP MTPS provides tools to split tracts and assign special land use tract type and name attribute information to that tract. Additionally, the PSAP MTPS will alert the user if their special land use tracts do not meet area requirements.

5. Ineligible boundary features

- Edit the census tract boundaries that follow ineligible boundary features so that they follow eligible features.
- To make the location of all PSAP geography entity boundaries less ambiguous, wherever possible, their boundaries should follow visible and identifiable

- features-especially roads. The use of visible features also makes it easier to locate and identify census tract boundaries over time, as the locations of many visible features in the landscape tend to change infrequently. The Census Bureau also requires the use of state and county boundaries in all states, and permits incorporated place and minor civil division (MCD) boundaries in states where those boundaries tend to remain unchanged over time. When acceptable visible and governmental boundary features are not available for use as boundaries, the Census Bureau may, at its discretion, approve other nonstandard visible features.
- The PSAP MTPS has an ineligible boundary features tool that can turn ineligible boundary feature line symbolization on and off and has a boundary change tool to edit the boundary of the tract.

Block groups

1. Above maximum

- Split block groups into two or more block groups when the population and housing unit count is above the maximum thresholds. The maximum thresholds for block groups are 3,000 for population and 1,200 for housing units.
- The PSAP MTPS flags all block groups that are above the maximum thresholds, and prompts the user to split those block groups to meet the threshold. The boundary change tool can also be used to edit block group boundaries to meet the thresholds.

2. Below Minimum

- Merge block groups into two or more block groups when the population and housing unit count is below the minimum thresholds. The minimum thresholds for block groups are 600 for population and 240 for housing units.
- The PSAP MTPS flags all block groups that are below the minimum thresholds and prompts the user to merge those block groups to meet the threshold. The boundary change tool can also be used to edit block group boundaries to meet the thresholds.

3. Ineligible boundary feature

- See the Census Tract "Ineligible boundary feature" section for information.

CDP

1. Below minimum

- Edit the CDP boundaries or remove the CDP if the CDP is below the minimum housing unit threshold. The minimum housing unit threshold is 3 housing units.
- The PSAP MTPS flags below minimum CDPs and prompts the user to edit the boundaries of the CDP, through the boundary change – add tool, so that the CDP meets the threshold. The remove tool can be used to remove CDPs that do not meet the threshold.

2. Create a new CDP

- Create a new CDP to encompass an unincorporated community that is not already delineated as a CDP. Divide a CDP that represents more than one community into two or more distinct CDPs.

- The PSAP MTPS provides a new tool to define a new CDP. The boundary change-remove tool can be used in conjunction with the new tool to divide a CDP that represents more than one community into two or more communities.

3. Remove a CDP

- Remove a CDP when the community no longer exists or a portion of the CDP has been incorporated and the CDP is no longer relevant.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a tool to remove existing CDPs.

4. Edit boundaries

- Edit the boundaries of a CDP when the area of the community designated by the CDP changed (i.e., the community grew or lost area).
- The PSAP MTPS provides boundary change tools to add area to or remove area from CDPs.

5. Change name

- Divide the CDP into two or more CDPs and change the name of the CDPs if the CDP name is hyphenated and it represents more than one community. Edit the name of a CDP if the name of the community has changed.

The MPTS provides tools to remove area from a CDP (boundary change-remove), to create a new CDP, and to change CDP attribute information (i.e., name).

CCD

Note: The Census Bureau does not encourage major revisions to the CCDs, since the goal of the program is to maintain a set of stable subcounty entities that allows for data comparability from census to census. However, updates and revisions may be necessary in some instances, such as where there have been revisions to census tract boundaries or intended to be conjoint but are not. Additionally, revisions to CCD names may be necessary due to population changes within CCDs.

1. New

- Create a new CCD to reflect the changes in area communities or to create or maintain a relationship between CCDs and census tracts.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a tool to split CCDs into one or more CCDs. The boundary change tool can be used to edit CCD boundaries.

2. Remove

- Remove a CCD if the area delineated as the CCD is no longer useful or relevant by merging the CCD with one or more adjacent CCDs or editing the boundaries of adjacent CCDs to cover the entire area of the CCD desired to be removed.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a tool to merge CCDs into adjacent CCDs and a tool to execute boundary changes to CCDs which can be used to remove the area from CCDs.

3. Change name

- Edit the name of the CCD if it no longer reflects area within the CCD and the community/communities within the CCD.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a change attribute tool to change the name of the CCD. This change attribute tool prompts the user to change the name of the CCD to the largest (most populous) incorporated place or CDP in the CCD.

4. Boundary change

- Edit the boundaries of the CCD so that the CCD has a relationship to census tracts or so that the CCD more accurately reflects the communities it contains.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a boundary change tool to edit the boundaries of a CCD.

5. Relationship to census tracts

- Edit the CCD boundaries if the CCD does not have a relationship to the census tract boundaries, i.e., the CCD does not nest within a census tract or one or more census tracts do not nest within the CCD.
- The PSAP MTPS provides a split tool, merge tool, and boundary change tool to edit CCDs.