



ASSOCIATION *of* PUBLIC DATA USERS



# Supporting the Census & ACS: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building - How State and Local Voices Can Make a Difference

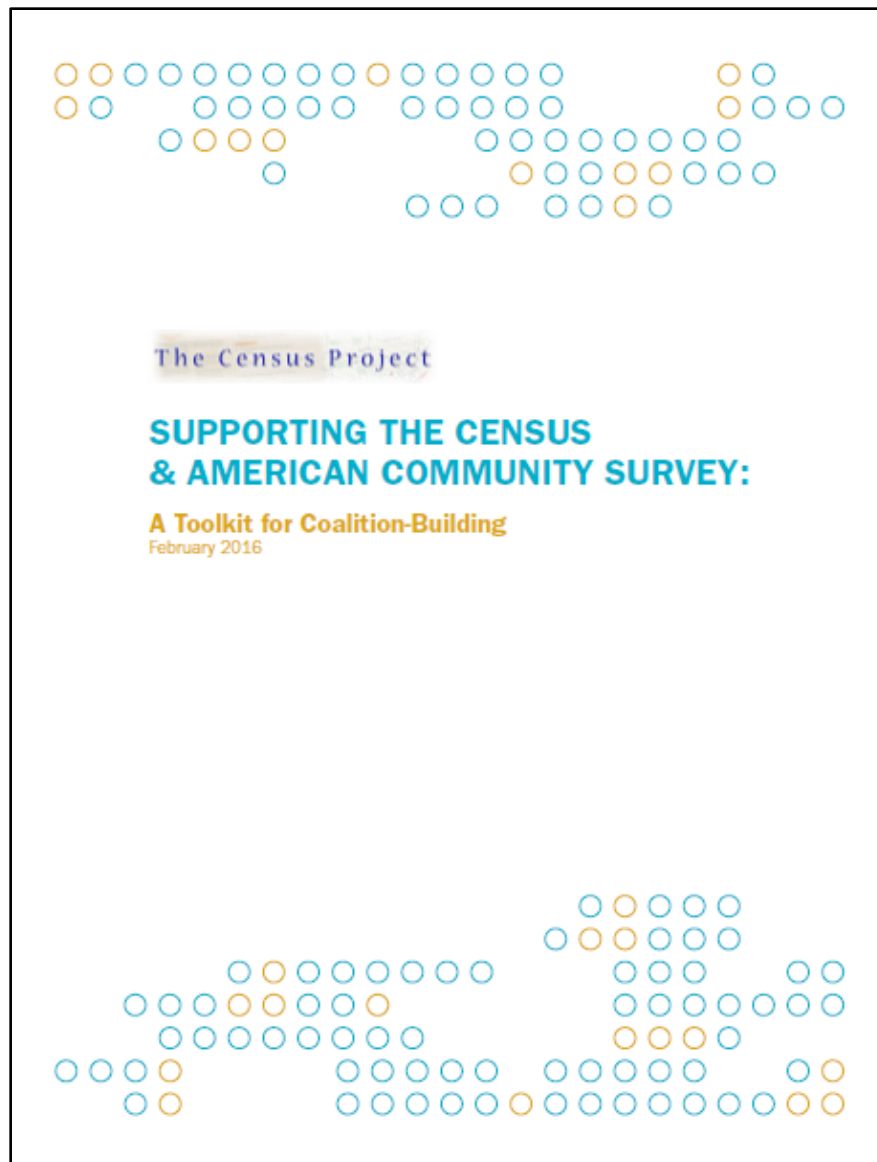
March 2, 2016

# A Toolkit for Coalition-Building



Engaging local voices is easy.

A free publication is now available on The Census Project website to help build a local stakeholder coalition to support census data.



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A Toolkit for Coalition-Building

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# Building an Effective Local Coalition



## ORGANIZE

- Get up-to-speed and stay informed <http://www.thecensusproject.org/>
- Choose an individual or organization to lead and coordinate the coalition
- Create a steering committee, board of directors, or advisory board
- Choose a name for your coalition
- Create a mission statement
- Determine your legal status and potential sources of funding, if appropriate

**CHECKLIST: Building an Effective Local Census Coalition**

Action Item	Who	By When	Status
<b>Get up to speed and stay informed</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign up for The Census Project updates			
<b>Choose leader/coordinator</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify organization or individual/s to lead coalition			
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm commitment; identify challenges			
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine resource needs & availability (staff, funds)			
<b>Create a steering committee or board</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Select and confirm members. Does it:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Represent a broad base?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Include a mix of leaders and data users?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Include technology/communications expertise?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Allocate tasks.			
<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting coordination			
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications			
<input type="checkbox"/> Social Media			
<input type="checkbox"/> Technical/website			
<input type="checkbox"/> Outreach to Congress			
<input type="checkbox"/> Manage outreach to supporters			
<input type="checkbox"/> Finances			
<input type="checkbox"/> Create a logo			
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider business cards			
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up email/gmail accounts for principal(s)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish address for official coalition business			
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose a name for your coalition			
<input type="checkbox"/> Create mission statement			
<b>Determine legal status and funding</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up new legal organization, if appropriate			
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine funding needs/sources			

*Your mission statement:*

- *Keep it short and simple*
- *Make it relevant to stakeholders and lawmakers*
- *Describe why accurate, timely census and ACS data are important to your state and communities*

**Checklist: Building an Effective Local Census Coalition**

# Building an Effective Local Coalition



## OUTREACH

- Start to build the coalition
  - *Geography*
  - *Business and economic development*
  - *Local units of government*
  - *NGOs – Nonprofits, foundations, and the faith community*
  - *Civil rights organizations*
  - *Newsmakers*

- Make the “ask” for organizations and individuals to become census data supporters



### BUILDING BLOCKS FOR AN EFFECTIVE STATE-LEVEL COALITION

(see Resources, page 24; Checklist)

Each state will have a different set of priorities, issues, and types of organizations that will have the highest impact with its congressional delegation. Reach out to those who have a stake in the continuation of high quality census data. Consider a wide variety of stakeholders, such as agency and policy leaders who can speak about their mission; analysts and researchers who are closest to the data needs and applications; and organizational government liaisons. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Geography.** Consider major metro areas, regional hubs, and rural areas. Start with your primary population center(s), and then expand across the state.
- **Business and economic development.** These voices are influential with all members of Congress. Local councils of government, chambers of commerce, and economic development agencies use census data to attract businesses and jobs, remain competitive, and attract workers and talent to the area. Leverage these non-partisan voices to highlight economic health and growth.
- **Local units of government.** State government agencies use census data extensively for education, economic development and employment, health care, housing, transportation, city and county planning, social services, and civil rights. Many are directly dependent on census data.
- **NGOs — Nonprofits, foundations, and the faith community.** These organizations use census data to identify community needs, monitor trends, and assess program effectiveness. Examples include USC – Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Catholic Charities, health agencies, Kids Count, Immigrant support agencies, and others.
- **Civil rights organizations.** Include groups that focus on issues for underserved and vulnerable populations, including communities of color, persons with disabilities, the LGBT community, immigrants and refugees, low-wage workers, and children.
- **Newsmakers.** Identify local issues that are illuminated by census data, and local leaders and organizations that are prominent in those discussions.

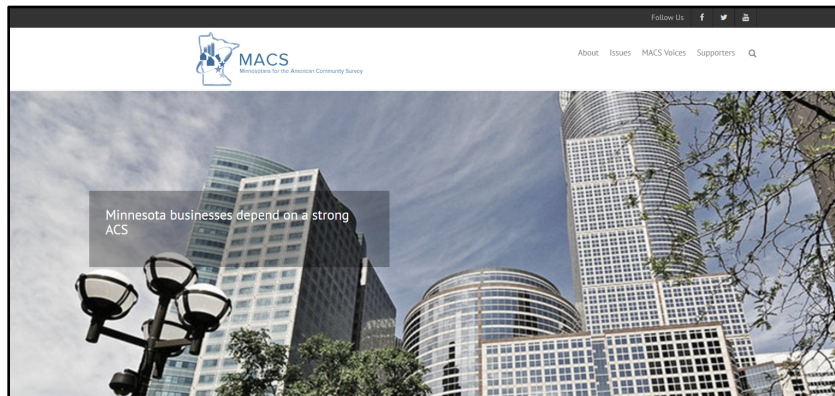
Building Blocks  
for an Effective  
State-Level  
Coalition

# The MACS Model

## Minnesotans for the American Community Survey



- Founded in 2013 in response to challenges to the ACS in Congress
  - Grew from 12 to 100 members between March & year-end 2013
  - Over 150 organizational and individual supporters now
- Relationships developed with all 10 MN congressional offices
  - Staff in both D.C. and district offices & meetings with members
  - Lawmakers took action in 2014 and 2015 to preserve and fund census data in both the House and Senate. 7 of 10 are active supporters!
- MACS Mission: *To educate Minnesota's congressional delegation and the public about the importance of consistent, reliable ACS census data for a healthy economy and to improve the well-being of all Minnesotans.*



Constituent  
voices matter



The Census Project

# Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work



- Set priorities
  - Make policy statements
  - Encourage action by stakeholders
  - Encourage action by lawmakers
- Work with national partners
- Create information materials
- Good communication is essential
  - Leverage technology – website, social media, contacts
  - Internal communications keep everyone informed & engaged
  - External communications tell your story

## Minnesotans for the American Community Survey (MACS)

### Why is the ACS important?

ACS Census data is often the foundation for sound policy planning, wise investments, resource allocation, & much more. Public, private, and non-profit sectors alike rely upon for data-driven decision making. ACS data help tell Minnesotans' stories, and then shape the policies that impact them.

### The Census Bureau is at a Crossroads

It must obtain sufficient funding now, or lose resources to test and implement new innovations that could save the Census Bureau \$5 billion on the 2020 Census. Organizations all over the state and the country stand to lose valuable data if the US Census is not properly funded for 2020.

### Local Projects Utilize ACS Data

### The ACS Faces Threats

**Elimination of 3-year Estimates**  
Due to budget cuts, the Census Bureau has already eliminated all future 3 year estimates.

**Voluntary Survey = Loss of Data**  
The U.S. Congress has recently attempted to make the ACS voluntary. A voluntary ACS would diminish the quality & availability of small-area data which guide daily decisions across the state. Neighborhoods, rural areas, & small populations would suffer the most.

**The Need for Funding is Immediate**  
The Census Bureau is in the "ramp up" period of testing and designing an efficient and effective system for the 2020 Census. Investing in this process now leads to +\$5 billion in unnecessary costs later.

**Insufficient Funding** → **Integrating equipment** → **\$5 billion in costs**

### Quality ACS data is vital to Minnesota's future

"Minnesota leaders...value good data and they use the American Community Survey daily to help make smart decisions."  
-MN State Demographer Susan Brower

"Without ACS information, frankly we're planning blind, and under-estimating billions of dollars. We want to spend it wisely, and I think you want us to spend it wisely as well."  
-MN Regional Chamber of Commerce President Todd Stangel

"We found that while many agencies are using ACS data...people don't always know that they're using data that comes specifically out of the American Community Survey."  
-MN State Demographer Susan Brower

### Minnesota and the ACS

Minnesota has among the highest ACS self-response rates in the entire nation!

MN:	72.245%	US:	59.76%
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(ACS preliminary self-response rates, 2012)

MN risks losing Congressional seat after 2020 Census. Innovative and accurate improvements to the 2020 Census are necessary for an accurate population count in order to retain our current seats in Congress.

Nearly half of MN cities are at risk for losing ACS data. Many of the state's cities are small enough that any significant decline in the ACS response rate would cause their data to be unavailable due to sample size.

### What can I do about it?

Join MACS to support full federal funding for the ACS and 2020 Census. There is no cost to join; simply add your name in support of essential data.

MACS is a coalition of Minnesota leaders, policy and decision makers, business and development planners, forecasters, housing and social service providers, educators, and engaged citizens. MACS Mission is to educate Minnesota's members of Congress and the public about the critical importance of census data to drive a strong economy and improve the well-being of all Minnesotans.

[www.MinnesotansForACs.org](http://www.MinnesotansForACs.org)  
Facebook: [MinnesotansForTheAmericanCommunitySurvey](https://www.facebook.com/MinnesotansForTheAmericanCommunitySurvey)

## TECHNICAL TOOLS ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND ESTABLISH A PROFESSIONAL LOOK.

- **Google Drive and Calendar:** Storage of materials and event/activity schedule
- **Doodle:** Coordination of schedules
- **Mailchimp:** Professional looking newsletters
- **Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn:** Social media
- **IFTTT.com:** A way to automate posting from all others, or from a blog to social media accounts
- **Squarespace/Wix/WordPress:** Easy to use, intuitive website creation options for those without a technical background
- **Canva.com:** A website to create professional graphics without a technical background

### Technical Tools

# Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work



- Continue to engage local supporters and partners
  - Make it easy to act
  - Leverage supporters' congressional contacts
  - Anticipate frequently asked questions
- Leverage the steering committee/board's network and expertise
- Engage the media – the press is a big consumer of census and ACS data

**KNOWING WHEN TO ACT**

Census stakeholders should be ready to communicate with their lawmakers at key moments in the legislative and appropriations process by following the lead of national census partners (see The Census Project website: Stakeholder Tools). There is a pattern to the federal legislative cycle during which key votes are made regarding Census Bureau programs. For a census data stakeholder coalition, action is concentrated in the Spring and Fall.

- **February:** President submits annual budget request for federal agencies and programs to Congress.
- **February – May:** House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees hold hearings to review budget requests for departments and agencies.
- **April – June:** Appropriations subcommittees (and subsequently full committees) draft and vote on 12 annual funding bills (called a "mark-up") covering federal government activities. The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies are responsible for Census Bureau funding.
- **June – September:** The House and Senate debate and vote on the annual appropriations bills. The federal fiscal year starts on October 1st.

In recent years (2012-2015), Congress has not completed appropriations bills on time or through normal legislative procedures, resorting instead to passing Continuing Resolutions to sustain funding at last year's level, or to roll all 12 separate appropriations bills into one omnibus appropriations bill. In addition, authorizing legislation, while infrequent, can occur at any time. For example, the House and Government Reform held a hearing in March 2015 on the Census Bureau's response voluntary.

Stakeholders should also reach out to congressional offices when Congress is not in session at a more informal "coffee", meeting, or event in the district. It is important to establish a working relationship with staff so the lawmaker will be ready to support census data and the ACS at key moments.

Knowing when to act



# Your Primary Goal: Educating Members of Congress



- Identify lawmakers' interests that are illuminated by census data
- Get to know congressional staff
- Arrange meetings with staff in the District and Washington offices, if convenient
- Keep staff members informed about legislative activities that affect the census and ACS.



Sample email requesting a meeting with a congressional office

# What do lawmakers hear about the ACS and census?



## WHAT DO LAWMAKERS HEAR ABOUT THE ACS?

In every congressional district, about 8,000 households receive the ACS questionnaire each year. Final ACS weighted household response rates are nearly 98 percent, with initial response rates (Internet and mail) averaging about 60 percent (although initial response rates are much lower across the South), reflecting an outstanding level of cooperation. Only a handful of people in each district call their member of Congress every year, asking about the questionnaire or expressing concerns about privacy or the legitimacy of the survey. It is Congress's job to respond to constituent concerns. It is essential that census stakeholders add balance to the conversation by conveying their support for ACS and census data.

The Census Bureau's Respondent Advocate addresses concerns from respondents and members of Congress about confidentiality, privacy, content, and response burden. The Respondent Advocate is an important ally for census coalitions, informing and educating members of Congress and the public about the need for ACS and census data and sharing the Census Bureau's stellar privacy track record. [Get to know the Respondent Advocate.](#)

**• The primary mission of the Respondent Advocate is to advocate for respondents in all matters relating to Census surveys and censuses. •**

*"The primary mission of the Respondent Advocate is to advocate for respondents in all matters related to Census surveys and censuses."*

### Putting Respondents First Census Bureau Survey Help

Public cooperation is vital to ensuring that the Census Bureau provides accurate statistics about our nation's people, places and economy to help all levels of government operate efficiently and enable entrepreneurs and businesses to make informed decisions that grow the economy and create jobs. The Census Bureau is committed to making its surveys user-friendly and serving respondents' needs.

#### STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SURVEY EXPERIENCE

- Appointing a Respondent Advocate within the Census Bureau
- Reviewing every question on the American Community Survey (ACS) to reduce time needed to reply
- Putting the American Community Survey (ACS) and 60 other surveys online to reduce the need for follow-up contacts

#### RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

##### DAVE WADDINGTON, RESPONDENT ADVOCATE

Dave is your advocate throughout the survey design and data collection process. He collects feedback from people who receive surveys, as well as Congressional staff and stakeholder groups, to ensure that your needs are met, your concerns are addressed, and questions are answered.

##### TELEPHONE HELP

Census Bureau staff are available to answer questions, assist with completing questionnaires, provide information on protecting the security and privacy of your personal information, and explain the purpose of every question.

##### CENSUS BUREAU REGIONAL OFFICES

Census Bureau Regional Office staff are available to help you. For more information, please visit [www.census.gov/regions](http://www.census.gov/regions).

##### CENSUS BUREAU WEBSITE

For FAQs related to our surveys and other information, please visit [census.gov](http://census.gov).



### How to Get Help

Constituents with concerns about any Census Bureau survey can contact the Census Bureau's Respondent Advocate with their questions by phone or email. Our goal is to reply to individual requests within 24 hours.

**Dave Waddington,  
Respondent Advocate**  
[respondent-advocate@census.gov](mailto:respondent-advocate@census.gov)  
301.763.3195

#### ACS Help Line

For help completing the form, from 9 a.m. to midnight Eastern time, call 1.800.354.7271

#### Census Call Center

For information about Census Bureau surveys and data, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern time, call 1.800.923.8282

#### ACS Website

[Census.gov/acs](http://Census.gov/acs)

#### Census Regional Offices

For information on contacting your regional office, go to [census.gov/regions](http://census.gov/regions)

# Alternative Models for Supporting Census Data



- Sector-Based Coalition
  - Partners and colleagues in your existing network, industry, or sector
- Targeting Congressional Committees
  - Appropriations Committees
  - Authorizing/Oversight Committees
- Rapid Response Strategy
  - Hybrid coalition across states, sectors, and interests.

“Big 7” - state and local government

**NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION**  
The Collective Voice of the Nation's Governors

HOME GOVERNORS NGA CENTER FOR BEST PRACTICES FEDERAL RELATIONS

**Federal Relations**  
NGA Committees  
NGA Policy Positions  
NGA Letters  
NGA Testimony  
NGA Leadership

**American Community Survey – Big 7**  
May 20, 2015

The Honorable John Culberson  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H-309 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
3028 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Fattah:

On behalf of the Big 7, a coalition of national organizations that represent state and local officials, we respectfully urge you to support continued funding of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) as you proceed with your deliberations on the FY16 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

The ACS is an ongoing statistical survey that samples the population each year in order to provide communities the information they need to plan investments and services. It is the most relied upon source of current socio-economic, housing and financial information in the country. The federal government, states and local communities all depend on this survey's essential data.

The ACS is the largest and only data set of its kind. Its critically important information is used to determine the amount of federal funds states and local governments receive for essential services such as education and public health. The survey's income data is used to determine federal allocations for Medicaid, a program that accounts for an estimated 43 percent of all federal grants to states. State and local governments also use ACS

The Leadership Conference  
The nation's premier civil & human rights coalition

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Home > Advocacy > Letters > 2015 > Oppose Amendments To Reduce Funding for Census Bureau

**Oppose Amendments To Reduce Funding for Census Bureau**  
Advocacy Letter - 06/01/15  
Source: The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Recipient: U.S. House of Representatives

View the PDF of this letter here.

FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act  
Oppose Amendments to Reduce Funding for the Census Bureau  
Oppose Any Reduction in Funding

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we are writing to you today to urge you to oppose any amendments to reduce funding for the FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Act for other programs. We also urge you to reject any voluntary survey or to eliminate the survey altogether.

The Leadership Conference considers a fair and accurate census the cornerstone of our nation's democracy. Census data ensures fair, prompt access to education, health care, and rural broadband access. It also ensures that our nation's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in meeting H.R. 2578, can meet the Census Bureau's budget request for the 2016 census. At stake is the future of the census, a program that accounts for an estimated 43 percent of all federal grants to states. State and local governments also use ACS

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

C2ER THE COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH  
MDMA  
ICSC NATIONAL MULTIFAMILY HOUSING COUNCIL  
MRA National Association of Home Builders  
APARTMENT LEADERSHIP BESIDES HERE™  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®  
NADA NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS

April 13, 2015

Honorable John Culberson  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H-309 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H-309 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Fattah:

As you consider federal agency funding for Fiscal Year 2016, we respectfully urge you to support continued funding of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)

Business Community

Bring actions to the state and local level

The Census Project

# Conclusion



## NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.

The stakes are high for informed decision-making. The potential loss of consistent, accurate, small area census data requires immediate action from local areas and local voices.

- Constituents rarely mention support for census data to members of Congress. Yet, census data are used widely across all sectors of every lawmaker's district and state.
- Congress holds the power to:
  - provide adequate and timely funds for the 2020 Census and ACS.
  - maintain the ACS as a mandatory survey.
- Constituents matter to members of Congress – your voice has impact.

**Imagine.... if 5-10 census stakeholders in *every congressional district* informed their member of Congress and both senators that **census data and the ACS are critically important** to their local economy and the well-being of all, census data would have much stronger support in Congress.**



IT'S IN OUR HANDS

The Census Project

Get started. It's easy!



# Local voices can change this outcome.

Download your free copy of

“Supporting the Census & American Community  
Survey: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building”

at <http://www.thecensusproject.org/>

## Questions? Comments?



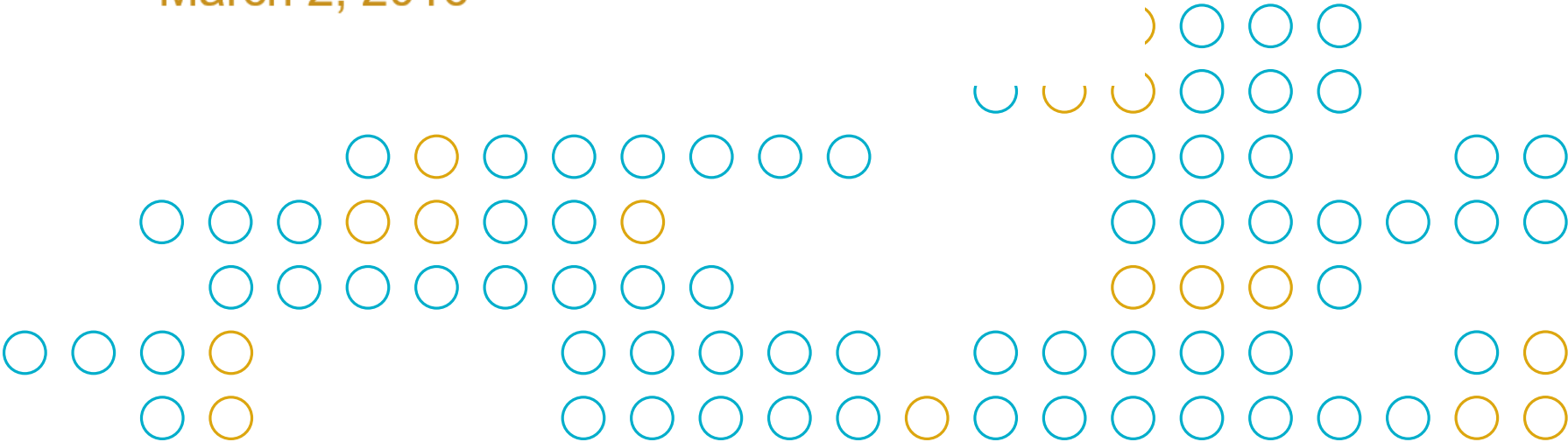
# Thank you for attending today's APDU/Census Project Webinar

## SUPPORTING THE CENSUS & AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY:

A Toolkit for Coalition-Building

## APDU/Census Project WEBINAR

March 2, 2016







ASSOCIATION *of* PUBLIC DATA USERS

# **Supporting the Census & ACS: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building - How State and Local Voices Can Make a Difference**

**March 2, 2016**

## **Host**

Brendan Buff, Association of Public Data Users

## **Introduction**

Warren Brown, President, Association of Public Data Users

## **Presenters**

- Phil Sparks, Co-Director, The Census Project
- Joan Naymark, Executive Director, MACS – Minnesotans for the American Community Survey