

WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

June 2009

Site of the Month

Mail Response Rates to the ACS

This newsletter discusses: (1) the usefulness of the American Community Survey (ACS), (2) the effect of a second mailing on final mail ACS response rates, and (3) Nevada's mail response rate to the ACS. My objective in writing this newsletter is to get the word out about the ACS survey, in hope of increasing Nevadans' participation to ensure the best available data on children and youth in our state. As a data provider, I believe that the most effective decisions and policies regarding the welfare of children and youth are based on quality data.

The ACS, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, collects information from a random sample of about three million households per year in the U.S., including information on children. Questionnaires are mailed every month. The questions in the ACS are similar to those in the decennial census.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is a regular user of the ACS data. The Foundation uses ACS data in its national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* to assess trends in child well-being and to compare the status of children across states. Data for five of the ten key child well-being indicators used to assess child well-being are taken from the ACS.¹

High participation in a survey helps to increase the accurateness of estimates. The question is: How well have we done as a nation and as a state in responding to the mail version of the ACS? According to the publication, *Documentation of Weighted Mail Response Rates for the 2000-2007 American Community Survey and the 2005-2007 Puerto Rico Community*, the initial mail ACS response rate decreased over the years. From 2000 to 2007, the initial mail response rate fell from 40.6 to 34.0 nationwide, as shown in the table on page 3. Nevada's mail-response-rate declining pattern over the eight-year period mirrors that of the U.S. rate, albeit the mail response rates are lower. Nevada's initial mail response rate fell from 37.2 to 28.8. A second mailing of the ACS, however, increased the final mail response rate for the U.S. and Nevada to 55.3 percent and 48.4 percent, respectively, for 2007.²

¹The five indicators are (1) percent of children in single-parent families; (2) percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment; (3) percent of teens not attending school and not working; (4) percent of teens who are high school dropouts; and (5) percent of children in poverty.

²Data collection for the ACS consists of selecting a sample of households, mailing an advance letter about the survey to households, mailing the survey to a sample of households, and mailing a second survey 24 days after the first mailing. A reminder card is also sent. For households that do not respond to the mail survey, a telephone call and a personal visit follow, but only a subsample of households is selected for the personal visit.

Nevada ranked among the states with the lowest final mail response rate in 2007. Only Alaska (40.1 percent), Mississippi (46.3 percent), Louisiana (46.6 percent), Texas (47.3 percent), and New Mexico (48.3 percent) had lower final mail response rates.

Nevada's overall response rate to the ACS, which also includes telephone surveys and personal interviews, is not bad. In 2006,³ Nevada's overall response rate to the ACS was higher than the overall response rate for the U.S. (97.8 versus 97.5). Twenty-three states had a higher overall response rate than Nevada. Response rates among the states and the District of Columbia ranged from a low of 91 in the District of Columbia to a high of 99 in West Virginia.⁴

³Housing-unit response rate. Data for 2007 were unavailable.

⁴U.S. Census Bureau, Using the Data: Quality Measures, Nevada, available at: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/acs-php/quality_measures_response_2006.php, as of 8/11/09.

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Initial and Final Mail Response Rates to the American Community Survey for the U.S. and Nevada: 2000 – 2007

Year	Area	Initial Mail	Final Mail	Difference
		Response Rate	Response Rate	(Final - Initial)
2000				
	US	40.6	59.7	19.1
	NV	37.2	55.0	17.7
2001				
	US	39.5	58.0	18.5
	NV	34.9	51.6	16.7
2002				
	US	39.9	58.6	18.7
	NV	35.2	52.8	17.6
2003				
	US	38.3	57.6	19.3
	NV	33.5	50.7	17.2
2004				
	US	37.5	57.4	19.8
	NV	32.2	50.4	18.2
2005				
	US	36.7	57.1	20.4
	NV	31.4	50.1	18.7
2006				
	US	35.0	55.9	20.9
	NV	28.8	48.5	19.7
2007				
	US	34.0	55.3	21.3
	NV	28.8	48.4	19.5

Source: *Documentation of Weighted Mail Response Rates for the 2000-2007 American Community Survey and the 2005-2007 Puerto Rico Community*, 2008 American Community Survey Variance Memorandum Series #ACS-V-01.