What Makes Your Community Special:
Conducting a Needs Assessment

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Discovering the Story of Your Community

Image source: https://live.staticflickr.com/5469/8977309966_8c51b7dde5_b.jpg

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Session Goals

- Learn techniques and best practices for community assessment
- Identify (free) resources for community research
- Begin to consider equity indicators
- Introduce an asset-based approach to community assessment

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Breakout: Crystal Springs Public Library

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- Consultant Discussion (10 min)
  - Impressions about the Crystal Springs community
  - Recommendations based on the community profile
- Report out (10 min)
  - One impression about Crystal Springs
  - One recommendation for CSPL
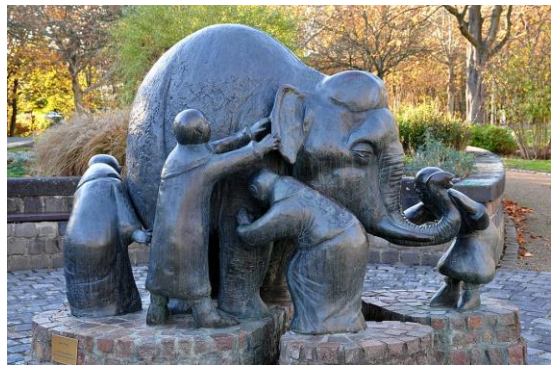
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What is a Community Assessment?

- Describes the people who make up the community
- Reveals community assets and needs
- Identifies environmental factors and resources that might impact library services
- May suggest library goals and outcomes
- Demonstrates the library's understanding of the community to others

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Benefits of community assessment

- Learn about residents who don't use the library
- Increase connections with other community organizations and groups
- Better align library services with community needs
- Move toward community-led programs and services

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Three methods

- Community Research
  - Published Data Sources
- Talking with people
  - Interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Original surveys
- Looking around
  - Drive/walk around
  - Online maps and views

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Community Assessment is Iterative

Process

Plan
- What are our questions?
- Who will participate?
- What sources will we use?
- Who is our audience?

Adjust
- How have our community assessment needs changed?
- What should be the focus of the next iteration?

Do
- Research
- Connect
- Observe
- Synthesize & Report

Study
- How well did we achieve the plan?
- Which original questions remain?
- What new questions do we have?

Products

New Library | Equity | Career Progs

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Community Data Research

What Makes Your Community Special

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Why do community data research?

- Understand the big picture
- Start to see categories and groups
- Compare circumstances
- Identify trends
- Clarify your scope
- Generate questions

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PEST Analysis Framework

- Political
- Economic
- Social-Cultural
- Technological

- Other configurations
  - PESTLE = PEST + Legal + Environmental
  - STEEPLE = PEST + Environmental + Legal + Ethical
  - SLEPT = PEST + Legal

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Types of Data in Community Research

Demographic Information
- Statistical data about the population and particular groups within it

Indexes
- A numerical system that compares values to each other or to a fixed standard

Market Segmentation
- A method of grouping people who have common needs and respond in a similar way, especially in purchasing habits

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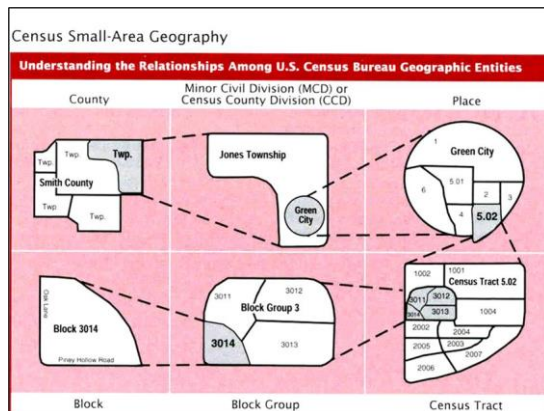## Data Literacy Tips for Library Staff

- Knowing how the data was gathered and analyzed will help you understand its meaning

- Understanding a few foundational statistical concepts will be all you need most of the time

- Don't rush or make assumptions; take the time to understand what the data says

It is easy to lie with statistics; it is easier to lie without them.
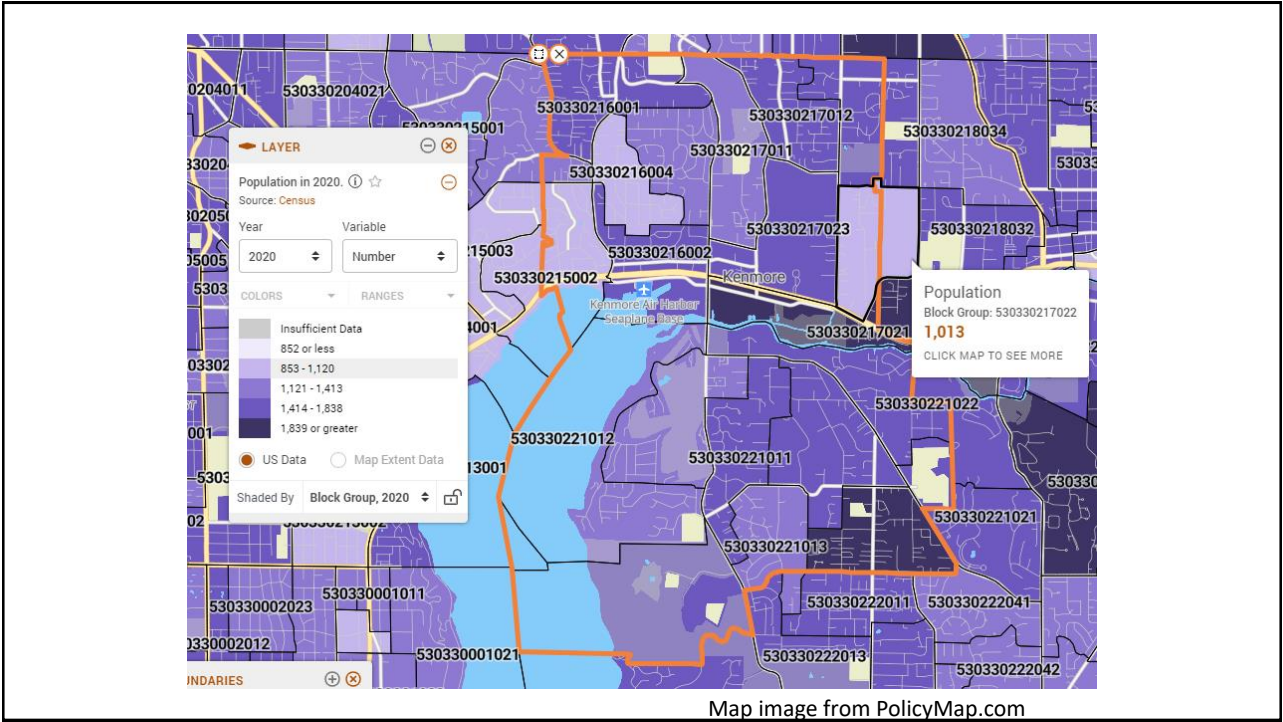
Frederick Mosteller

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Understanding Census Bureau Geography

Census Small-Area Geography

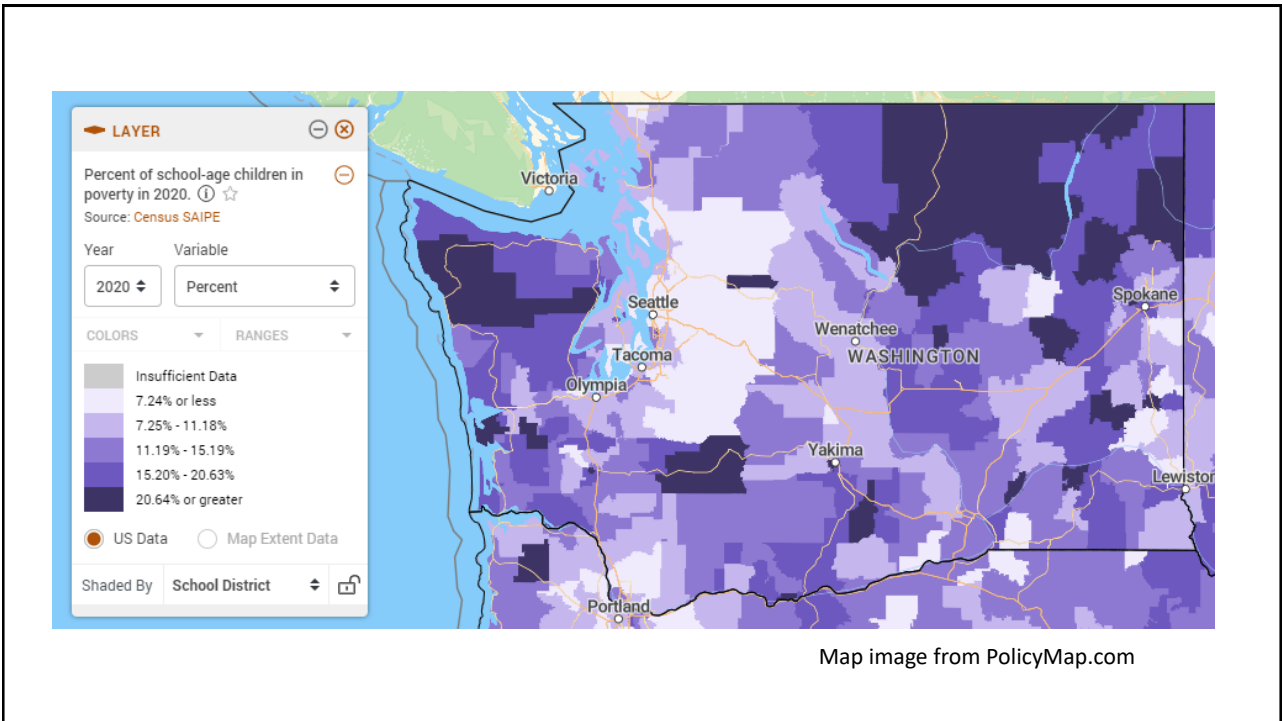Understanding the Relationships Among U.S. Census Bureau Geographic Entities

- Census geographies align **only** with state and county boundaries

- Census geographies can change as part of preparation for the decennial census

- Although data is gathered at the Census Block level, the smallest reported unit is often the Census Block Group
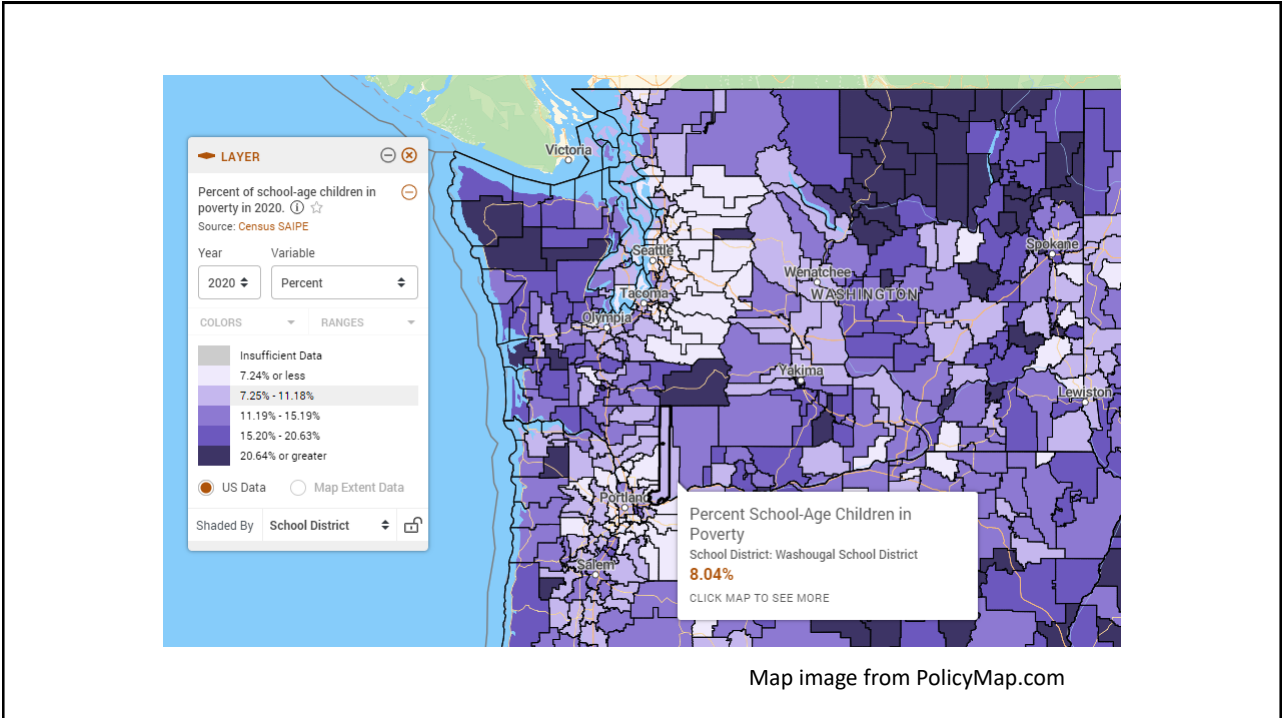
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Map image from PolicyMap.com

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Who Cares?
Strategies for Data That's Hard to Find

Type of Data	Source	How to Get It
Language Spoken at Home	Washington Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction	Request data from the annual survey of families
Religion	Pew Resource Center	National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS) results on website
Housing Instability	Local organizations	Contact local organization
	Dept of Housing & Urban Dev (HUD) – State only	HUD website or PolicyMap.com

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Equity Indicators

- Gini Index of income inequality
- Percent of families eligible for free and reduced price lunch
- Persistent poverty
- Housing cost burden
- Subscription to internet

KEY QUESTIONS FOR **EQUITY IMPACT AWARENESS** — King County — Office of Equity & Social Justice

Progress must be swift and this is an imperfect tool. Nevertheless, it aims to identify communities that are extremely vulnerable to prolonged hardship with less resources to recover in an economic crisis. These are not the only considerations in reviewing sites, however these questions will highlight the inequities of risks in the County by **race, economics,** and **age.**

Does this community's Black, American Indian & Alaska Native and Latinx residents together exceed 10%*? 20% of residents?

Are more than 20% of this community's household incomes within 200% of the federal poverty level**? 30% of households?

Do less than 50% of this community's households own the home they live in?

Have more than 16% of residents in this community experienced food insecurity in the last year?

Are more than 14% of residents of this community 65 years or older?

*The thresholds were chosen to highlight extreme economic conditions and to locate the 25% of areas with the most risk.
**The federal poverty threshold for a family of 4 in 2019 was $26,370.

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Breakout: Your Community Research Plan

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- Record your own ideas (5 min)
  - Use the form in the Playbook to list community data that you need and possible sources
- Share ideas with group (10 min)
  - Suggest additional data and sources
- Report out (5 minutes)
  - One great idea
  - One data puzzler

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Looking Around

Validating the Data

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Why walk—or drive—around the community?

- Familiarize yourself with areas you don't frequent
- Learn where community organizations and services are located
- Identify challenges in the physical environment
- Identify and overcome delays in reporting

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Community Asset Mapping

Why do it?

- Promotes community involvement
- Recognizes and documents community strengths and existing resources
- Helps identify community networks
- Helps identify others who share your goals

What is included?

- Capacities and abilities of community members
- Physical structures or places
- Businesses that support community
- Associations of community members
- Private, public, and nonprofit organizations

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Community Assessment Report

Communicating the Story of Your Community

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Community Assessment Report

- Executive summary
- Methodology
- Community data summary
- Community needs that you identified
- Community assets
- Recommendations based on your findings
- Appendices, if needed

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Fluff and Fold

- Update key data annually
- Keep up with changes in the PEST categories
- Continually cultivate new relationships with community and organizational leaders

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Questions? Comments?

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