



2020 Census Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP) Quick Reference: Census Tracts

Census tracts are relatively permanent geographic divisions of a county or county equivalent. The purpose of the census tract is to provide a set of nationally consistent, relatively small statistical units, with stable boundaries, that facilitate analysis of data across time. The U.S. Census Bureau prioritizes the comparability of census tracts from decade to decade. Therefore, we request that you do not change the outer boundaries of any census tracts when making census tract updates, unless it is a correction due to boundary or feature inaccuracy. The Census Bureau uses census tracts in the tabulation and presentation of data from the decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS).

Census Bureau criteria specify that census tracts must:

- Nest within county boundaries.
- Cover the entire land and water area of the county.
- Be reasonably compact and contiguous.
- Meet the population/housing unit thresholds as specified in Table 1. For counties that have fewer than 1,200 residents, the Census Bureau will define one census tract that encompasses the entirety of the county.
- Have census tract codes ranging from 1 to 9989 that must be unique within each county. Special use tract codes must range from 9800 to 9899. The acceptable range of census tract suffixes for split census tracts is from .01 to .98.

Census Bureau guidelines recommend that census tracts:

- Have boundaries that follow visible features (e.g., roads, rivers) or other acceptable features (e.g., tribal reservation, tribal subdivision, incorporated place, and minor civil division boundaries).
- Be merged when census tracts are below the minimum population (1,200) or housing unit (480) count with adjacent census tracts. Participants should split any census tracts above maximum population (8,000) or housing unit (3,200) counts into multiple census tracts. When revising tracts, participants should aim to meet or exceed the optimum population (4,000) or housing unit (1,600) thresholds to increase the reliability of sample data for census tracts.

Table 1: Census Tract Thresholds

Census Tract Type	Threshold Type	Optimum	Minimum	Maximum
Standard Census Tracts	Population	4,000	1,200	8,000
	Housing Unit	1,600	480	3,200
Special Use Census Tracts (Encompassing an employment center, large airport, park, forest, or large water body with no (or very little) population or housing units)	Area measurement	At least comparable in size to surrounding census tracts		
	Employment	Suggested minimum of 1,200 workers or jobs		

Refer to the Respondent Guide for complete instructions.