

Data Sources for Understanding Your Community

There's a treasure trove of free public data available online that can help you better understand your community. Sometimes, the data confirms common conceptions about our communities. Other times, the data reveals commonly held misconceptions about our communities.

Federal Data

U.S. Census ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov)) Population counts are only the tip of the iceberg available from the U.S. Census data. Search and download fascinating demographic and socioeconomic data about your state or metro area, including these useful tools:

American Community Survey ([census.gov/acs/www/](https://www.census.gov/acs/www/)) Use the U.S. Census' "American Community Survey" to find detailed information about your community's population and how it lives. Many non-profits use this data to help determine where to locate services and allocate resources.

On The Map (lehdmap3.did.census.gov/themap3/) This U.S. Census online tool provides detailed maps showing where workers are employed and where they live with companion reports on age, earnings, industry distribution, and local workforce indicators

Consumer Expenditure Survey Tables ([bls.gov/cex/#tables](https://www.bls.gov/cex/#tables)) Find out how the average person in your community actually spends their money by searching the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Bureau of Economic Analysis ([bea.gov/regional/reis](https://www.bea.gov/regional/reis)) Use these tools to track commuters and Earnings Flows into and out of your county or metro area.

Headwaters Economic Profiles ([headwaterseconomics.org/profiles/index.php](https://www.headwaterseconomics.org/profiles/index.php)) Download a free and complete socioeconomic profile of any county in the United States from this independent, non-profit research group. Community Poverty guidelines <http://aspe.hhs.gov/POVERTY/09poverty.shtml> Access the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services poverty guidelines used for determining poverty levels.

WOW Self-Sufficiency Guidelines ([wowonline.org/ourprograms/fess/index.asp](https://www.wowonline.org/ourprograms/fess/index.asp)) The Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) calculates the income working families need to meet their most basic expenses, without public or private assistance of any kind. Calculated based on U.S. Census data and other credible sources, the SSS is provided by Wider Opportunities for Women, a not-for-profit organization that works to build pathways to economic independence for America's families, women, and girls.

Health Status Indicators (communityhealth.hhs.gov/homepage.aspx?j=1) The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services provides searchable data by state and county detailing measures of health, access to care, and other information.

Economic Snapshots (uwex.edu/ces/cced/economies/economicssnapshot/index.cfm) See examples of how UW-Extension has used many of the data sources listed on this page to better understand a community.

State Agency Data:

Most states have relatively current data related to employment data and trends, as well as education enrollment counts, and other data sets. Check with your state Department of Labor or Workforce Development (different states use different names). You might also consult your news and public affairs department as they may be aware of useful state data sources.

Examples of state data sets:

- Nebraska Department of Labor: (<http://www.dol.state.ne.us>)

University and College Survey and Poll Data

Many universities and colleges conduct reputable surveys that may help you understand everything from community economic factors to attitudes and other social indicators. Check with your local university or college.

Examples:

- Nebraska Rural Poll: (<http://cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll>)
- Creighton University Economic Outlook: (<http://www.2creighton.edu/business/economicoutlook>)