2021 IASSIST US Regional Secretary Report

Stephanie Tulley
Regional Secretary

Membership updates

US membership has remained steady over the last couple of years, 275 members currently (compared to 283 in 2019, 262 in 2020).

Issues of interest

Decennial census

The most thorough tabulation of U.S. residents, the Decennial Census, took place in 2020 under unprecedented circumstances.

- Collection methods and timelines were altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic
    o A completion rate of 99.9% of households tallied was reported by the Census, but there is debate over what this new measure covers (it does not represent % of households who completed the census forms, but households tallied by any means).

- Challenges from the Trump administration on the historical practice of collecting data on all individuals in the U.S. at the time of the census, including undocumented immigrants, for the purposes of reapportionment. The Supreme Court "punted" this case in 2020.

- Modernizing privacy protections is top priority for the Census, and certain results & products from the Census will be altered by statistical noise- using the new disclosure avoidance system (DAS) in an effort to withstand re-identification threats. Concerns remain among some about the new system's impact on the accuracy and reliability of the data.

American Community Survey (ACS)

Historical demographer, IPUMS Director, and legend Steven Ruggles described planned changes to the ACS that were announced by the Census Bureau at the 2021 ACS Data Users conference. In a major change from current practice, the Census plans to replace the ACS microdata with "fully synthetic" data over the next three years in an effort to reduce disclosure risk. Few details are known about the methodology.

*A summary of this issue can be found in the following Twitter thread from Steven Ruggles: https://twitter.com/HistDem/status/1395774558096039938

*Special thanks to Lisa Neidert for sharing this important information to the IASSIST listserv.

COVID-19

As with other regions, the COVID-19 pandemic radically altered the way in which US members supported their researchers and the research process. Most support has transferred to a fully virtual environment, although many organizations and institutions have plans to re-enter the physical workplace in 2021.

Antiracism in Research

New centers, programs, and efforts have been launched to support antiracist research and scholarship, and push for a more inclusive and just future. Programs like these will (and have) lead to the collection and publication of data sources that focus on race and ethnicity.

In addition to collecting and sharing information about those new sources with users, data professionals supporting researchers at all levels must work to dismantle systemic racism in data sciences and librarianship.** This discussion has begun in our IASSIST community, but requires ongoing effort and resources.

New programs of note:

-   Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University, founded by Ibram X. Kendi
    The Center | Center for Antiracist Research (bu.edu)

-   Racism and the Economy event series, hosted by all 12 Banks of the Federal Reserve System
    Racism and the Economy | Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (minneapolisfed.org)

** Special thanks to Elizabeth Foster for this call to action on the IASSIST listserv.