

The New American FactFinder

(or <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html>)

BY MARY C. BUJOLD, CRE

THOSE OF US WHO NEED TO USE U.S. CENSUS DATA ON A regular basis are no doubt already familiar with the “*New American FactFinder*” (AFF), the Census Bureau’s website for all census data. Of course, anything “new” represents change and the new data website is a *significant* change from the previous one.

When first faced with the daunting task of trying to navigate the new AFF, I, a seasoned customer of the old website, tried valiantly to get into the head of the individual(s) who designed it so I could figure out how this new website was supposed to be so much “easier to navigate.” I am willing to admit that I kept going to the old *FactFinder* website until it cut me off on Jan. 20, 2012, and I was forced to use the new one.

The interface of the old AFF was definitely more user-friendly. It led the user clearly through simple steps, beginning with identifying the level of geography desired, whether that be state, county, city, census tract or block group. From there, the user was to select the specific geographies in the state in which they wanted to search. Once all geographies were identified in a convenient, step-down manner, the user could select the types of data or tables for the geographies. The download feature worked relatively well, although there were some confusing but manageable issues with Zip files.

Enter, AFF2! The initial home page is relatively appealing with a “Quick Search” feature that enables the user to rapidly search for limited information such as the population of a particular county or city or the number of households in a specific metro area. Because this feature is easy and quick to use, I found myself using it many

times, even when I should have been using the more robust tables feature. The quick search can provide you with a connection to a summary demographic profile for any level of geography. You can simply type in Population in the Topic or Table box and then type in the geography that you want in the other box, such as Minneapolis city, MN. You have to be somewhat careful to indicate that you want the city and the state because there may be other geographies with that same name in other locations in the country. Although they say that geography is “optional,” if you do not select a “Geography,” the list of population tables is seemingly endless and includes all types of tables with population as a category.

About the Reviewer



Mary C. Bujold, CRE, president, Maxfield Research Inc., Minneapolis, is considered a market expert in the field of residential real estate and in market analysis for financial institutions. As well as providing strategic, direction for the firm, Bujold heads project assignments for large-scale land use and redevelopment studies, including downtown revitalization for private developers and municipalities in the Twin Cities and in the Upper Midwest. Her work spans public and private sector clients, including institutional clients. Bujold also regularly testifies as an expert witness for eminent domain, tax appeal and other types of real estate litigation. She holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Marquette University and a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Minnesota.

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As an example, if you type in “population” and Fargo city, ND, you will find a list of tables from various census documents. If you are looking for recent census information, you can search for DP-1 which is a Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics with data from the 2010 Demographic Profile SF. This summary offers the following information for any census geography:

- Total Population
- Age Distribution of the Population by Sex
- Race of the Population
- Relationships of the Population (i.e. spouse, children, householder, group quarters, etc.)
- Total Households
- Household Type
- Number of Housing Units
- Occupied Housing Units
- Vacant Housing Units
- Number of Owned and Rented Housing Units

This is a good start for some basic information about any community or geographic area.

If you want to aggregate different geographies or search on multiple topics, it becomes very complicated from this point on. You must use the “filters” section on the left-hand side of the website to define your selections.

It took me almost an entire afternoon to figure out how to obtain a modest amount of data, which under the old *AFF* took only a few minutes, even when I was new to the old *AFF* site. Some blogs are recommending that users try a new website interface called *Social Explorer*, which has census data back to the beginning of time in the U.S. The *Social Explorer* website is identified as having a much easier and friendly interface than *AFF2*, especially for Decennial Census data or interim estimates through the American Community Survey.

For those of us who choose to tackle *AFF2*, below are my suggestions for navigating its many options.

As with the old *AFF*, my recommendation is to:

1) CHOOSE YOUR GEOGRAPHY FIRST

- From the Geography section, select “Within State,” then select “Within County” for multiple county subdivisions, or select “Within Place” if you are selecting cities, villages or census tracts. Once the list has filtered down to the level for which you are looking, place a check mark in each box beside the

“Geography” that you want included. If the geographies are on multiple pages, you must click the “Add” key on that page before moving to a new page, which will save your selected geographies. Make certain you have selected to include all geographies below your geography filter.

Next:

2) CHOOSE YOUR TOPICS

- From the “Topics” section, you can select a general topic, such as population or housing or identify a specific topic such as “Age Distribution,” “Household Type,” “Household Tenure,” “Household Income,” etc. The website will present you with a myriad of tables that contain the information listed on your subject. On the right-hand side of the list of tables is the source data for the information such as 2010 Census STF 1, 2009 ACS estimates, etc. You may have to scroll through a number of pages to get to the specific tables that you want. Do not give up at this point!! You are halfway there. Once you have found the table with the information for which you are looking, you can click on the Web link to that table and it will open on the screen.

Next:

3) SELECT YOUR OPTIONS FOR RETRIEVING THE DATA VIA PRINT OR DOWNLOAD

- Once you have retrieved your data, *AFF2* provides multiple options for its presentation. You can modify the table, bookmark the table, view, download and print from the screen. There are several download options and, here, I must admit that *AFF2* has surpassed the old *AFF* in this regard. Once you select “Download,” *AFF2* compiles the table for you and lets you know when it is complete. You can select Excel, PDF or Rich Text Format; you also can select paper size and landscape or portrait orientation. Usually, I select Excel so that I can also manipulate the data further on my own. If you download to an Excel file, all geographies are listed separately on the spreadsheet. If you choose “Print Version from the Screen,” each geography typically is listed separately and not aggregated; however, I believe that is another option, if I could spend more time figuring it out.

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I would also recommend the following references for further information beyond the brief and possibly still confusing summary that I have presented here:

1. www.socialexplorer.com.
2. <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>
Tutorial on Using *AFF2* on the website.
3. http://www.lib.unc.edu/reference/data_services/census/newaffwkbk.pdf - *The New American FactFinder Classroom Training Manual*—a brief, but generally effective document on how to navigate the primary features of *AFF2*.

I have to say that it will probably be 2020 before I can safely say that I have mastered the “New” *American FactFinder* and by then, it will have been replaced by something new and, dare I say it, more “user-friendly.” Hope springs eternal! ■