Spotlight – San Francisco Planning Department (from the September 2012 CSDC Network News)

The San Francisco Planning Department has been affiliated with the State Data Center since the Center's inception in 1979 and has represented the City and County of San Francisco over the course of three censuses.

Census-related analyses and demographic reports have always been part of the Department's community planning efforts but were considered a minor function. With the formation of the Information and Analysis Group (IAG) in 2007, however, additional energy has been devoted to working with the State Data Center and the Census Bureau. Although the group began as a limited effort with planners involved in other larger projects, its greater involvement has led to productive Census 2010 campaigns including LUCA, PSAP, and Compete Count. In 2008, the IAG prepared a successful challenge to the Census Bureau's count, effectively growing the City's population from 765,000 to 799,600. The IAG is also responsible for providing City agencies with annual data on San Francisco's "limited English proficiency" (LEP) population.

In response to numerous individual requests for demographic information about their neighborhoods, the IAG produced *San Francisco Neighborhoods Socio-Economic Profiles / American Community Survey (ACS) 2005-2009*; this publication was updated the following year using the 2006-2010 ACS: www.sf-planning.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=8779. The IAG will be updating the profiles annually with each five-year release of the ACS. A version covering the newly redrawn Board of Supervisors boundaries is also available: www.sf-planning.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=8777.

In the next few months, the IAG will be drilling down on ACS and Census 2010 data, looking especially at demographic trends in San Francisco that have planning implications. Topics of interest include families; who's moving into and out of the City; characteristics and distribution of children; and growing old in San Francisco.

L-R: Gary Chen, Moises Aceves, Mike Webster, Teresa Ojeda, Aksel Olsen, and Scott Edmondson
Backdrop: "The Changing Face of San Francisco, 1990-2010" poster

About the IAG Staff

Moises Aceves is the IAG's latest recruit, having started work in August 2012. He will be responsible for the annual Housing Inventory report and will act as the point person for all questions related to housing production. He is yet to be introduced to Census data.

Gary Chen is responsible for making sure that information and analysis generated by the group is visually appealing. He turns Census facts, figures and maps into forceful infographics that spark discussion and also appreciation of quantitative information turned into art. Gary is almost a San Francisco native, having lived in the City since he was six. He has been with the Planning Department for over five years.

Teresa Ojeda manages the IAG and makes sure that the work produced is not just accurate but appropriate. She started working at the Planning Department in 1999 and was designated to head the newly-formed IAG in 2007. Teresa is especially glad that American FactFinder has evolved into a user-friendly site because it is always better to teach the public how to access Census data than to do the research for them. She continues to be amazed that, in her travels, a Census-related question always pops up. Recently, in a train dining car in the middle of Nevada, Teresa met a visiting professor from France who wants to update her book to include 2000 and 2010 census data for California.

Aksel Olsen works primarily with ACS data but has had close encounters with microdata (PUMS), which he finds "fun." Aksel has been working with Census data using R and MSAccess, and was "pretty annoyed that the 114 headers of the ACS 2005-2009 table sequences were stored in separate files." This compelled him to write a script to do the dirty work of combining headers and data, store the result in a database and generate GIS layer files for each sequence. Ultimately it helped reduce the workflow of making neighborhood-level reports and, as Aksel said, "I would probably have done it regardless." He really gets into Census data, even finding and informing the Bureau about errors in the data released. Aksel says that the Bureau's support team is great and amicably corrected the mistakes he identified. He comes from Denmark, by way of San Diego. Aksel is starting his second year of coursework at UC Berkeley, where he is a PhD student.

Mike Webster is cartographer extraordinaire. His 4' x 8' poster, "The Changing Face of San Francisco, 1990-2010," is a visually compelling account of how the City's demographics have changed over time. Mike joined the Planning Department in 2006 as an intern and stayed on after he received his B.A. and later his M.A. from San Francisco State University. As a GIS Specialist, Mike uses ArcMap to generate maps using Census data. He is careful to explain to others that although his work may look effortless, requests, such as "the demographic breakdown and socio-economic characteristics of an area 1500 feet around address X" takes time and thoughtful decisions. Mike appreciates that the Census Bureau manages to collect data despite the fact that "the fiscal winds are always against them." He is also grateful for the "SDC, who really listen because they are real down-to-earth folk."