

Spotlight – Southern California Association of Governments (from the March 2012 CSDC Network News)

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the largest metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and council of governments (COG) in the nation, serving six counties, 191 cities, and a population of more than 18 million persons spread over 38,000 square miles. SCAG was founded in 1965, when local elected officials from 56 cities and five counties created a regional planning effort for Southern California's future. SCAG is responsible for identifying Southern California's transportation priorities through the development of a Regional Transportation Plan and, more recently, a Sustainable Communities Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. SCAG is also responsible for implementing the state Regional Housing Needs Assessment. In addition, SCAG acts as an information clearinghouse, providing mapping, forecasting, and regional statistics to members, stakeholders, and the general public.

In its capacity as a source for data and information about the Southern California region, SCAG has been an active member of the California State Data Center (SDC) Network. As one of the five coordinating agencies (in addition to ABAG, SACOG, SANDAG, and UC Berkeley), SCAG has taken a lead role in organizing census activities since the 1980's. This role includes the promotion of decennial census activities and the coordination of training for programs such as the Boundary and Annexation Survey, Local Update of Census Addresses, American Factfinder, and the American Community Survey.



L to r: Jung Seo, Ying Zhou, Javier Minjares, Kimberly Clark

Javier Minjares, Regional Planner Specialist and SDC liaison, leads staff members involved in census activities. Mr. Minjares has been with the SDC program since 1990 and has participated in SDC planning for the last three decennial censuses. Also, involved in the program is Ms. Ying Zhou, Regional Planner Specialist, who is the lead programmer. Ms. Zhou has been at SCAG for 20 years and is an accomplished SAS programmer. Previously, Ms. Zhou was responsible for processing the old 9-track reel census tapes that DRU's Nancy Gemignani used to send out to the SDC network!! Recent additions to the program are Ms. Kimberly Clark, Senior Regional Planner, and Mr. Jung Seo. They focus on mapping and disseminating census data. These four staff members do not work full-time on census activities but have other responsibilities as well: they split their time among project management, data processing, research, and other planning activities at SCAG.

In the SCAG region, seven coordinating agencies are currently affiliate members of the SDC Network. Those agencies are the counties of Imperial, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura plus California State University, Northridge, and the University of Southern California. More information about the seven agencies can be found at

http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/affiliates/.

SCAG uses decennial census and American Community Survey (ACS) data for a variety of demographic, economic, and household analyses. For example, with the recent release of the SCAG draft 2012

Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy, SCAG conducted an Environmental Justice analysis to ensure the protection of underrepresented and poorer communities from incurring disproportionate environmental impacts.

Historically, SCAG maintained all census data and other large datasets in SAS for easy processing. With the introduction of American Factfinder, SCAG has moved away from using SAS exclusively and instead now does some processing using Microsoft Access. Files are then stored in either Excel or in a GIS format for ease of use. Because SCAG caters to a large number of data users, they continuously strive to maintain data in a user-friendly way. They are also available on the telephone to talk people through the American Factfinder application. They would like to thank staff at the local Census Bureau regional office for spending a day at SCAG teaching the ins and outs of using the new American Factfinder.

One of the recent developments at the SCAG Census Data Center is the implementation of a GIS Services program. This effort involves the distribution of 21 computers to local jurisdictions to develop GIS skills. In addition to these computers, the plan is to provide the jurisdictions with GIS software, census data, and other SCAG data. SCAG will then follow-up with the jurisdictions to provide Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced GIS training. The goal is to teach jurisdictions how to produce thematic maps, conduct spatial analyses, and provide SCAG with updated information on existing land use, zoning, building permits, etc. They hope to use this program to get more jurisdictions involved in planning for census activities.

As you can see, SCAG is working on many interesting projects. They share the goal of the State Data Center to promote and facilitate the sharing of information and experience between network members. You are encouraged to contact SCAG staff if you have any questions or would like to learn more about any activities mentioned here. SCAG also expects to present at the annual ESRI International Conference in San Diego in July about our GIS Services program and you are encouraged to attend.

Lastly, SCAG would like to invite you to attend the 24th Annual USC/SCAG Demographic conference scheduled for May 21, 2012. This annual event will focus on census data as well as other information of interest for demographers, economists and those with an interest in data. More information is available at <http://www.scag.ca.gov/demographics/>.