

An Overview of Sampling

What is sampling? Sampling is a statistical method of obtaining representative data or information from a population. Sampling is used when a census, collecting data from every unit or person in a population, is cost-prohibitive. As long as a sampling method is used in which each unit or person in the population has a known and positive chance (probability) of being selected, the sample is called “representative” because the characteristics of the population can be inferred from the characteristics of the sample.

Why is it used? First, collecting data for a sample is less expensive than for a census. Second, having to collect data from fewer people can be done faster than a census. Third, more attention can be given to each person than would be possible for a census. More attention to each person can result in more accurate data of higher quality and higher response rates.

How does it work? The sampling process involves 6 stages:

1. Defining the population of interest
2. Identifying a *sampling frame* or list of individuals or households to measure (as much of the population of interest as possible)
3. Specifying a *sampling method* for selecting individuals or households from the frame
4. Determining the sample size
5. Implementing the sampling plan to select the sample
6. Collecting data from each sample member (i.e., conducting the survey)

How does sampling apply to the Housing Needs Assessment? The goal of the housing needs study is to describe households and their housing needs and conditions across Indian Country. In order to achieve a nationally representative sample, 40 tribal areas were selected using population counts to guarantee that every tribal member had an equal chance of being included in the sample. Having a diverse selection of tribal areas allows estimates from the sample to be nationally representative. Estimates based on the interviews from a group of households in the 40 sampled tribal areas can be used to create national estimates of housing needs across Indian Country. Because they are national estimates, they cannot be applied to any particular reservation, native village or tribal service area.