Data Innovation Project
Featured Data Source: *The U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder*

What is the source?
The American FactFinder is a United States Census Bureau data site. The data on this site can be used to find information on the United States and its territories.

www.factfinder.census.gov

Where does the data come from?
Data on the American FactFinder comes from a variety of sources including most notably the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Decenniel Census.

Why use it?
If you need to find relevant census data, the American FactFinder is probably the first place you will go. There are thousands of tables and other data products available to the general public. They can be utilized if you are in need of poverty data for your food pantry's specific service area, or are looking for housing statistics from the most recent ACS for your organization's records. It is especially useful if you need to compare regional data for multiple places across county lines.

Why are we featuring this site?
Although a very comprehensive site with seemingly endless information, FactFinder is not always user friendly. We hope this data brief can assist you in learning more about the basics and open a world of data potential for you in future research endeavors. *Read on for a quick tutorial on how to compare data from multiple towns and counties in Maine!*

Research Tip!
If you have used FactFinder in the past, odds are that you have followed the default instructions and used the "Community Facts" Search engine. It is oftentimes more useful to use advanced search and to start at "geographies" if you have a specific question in mind or are looking for a particular dataset.

Figure 1. American FactFinder Advanced Search Page

Want to learn more about using the census for your research?
Check out the U.S. Census Bureau's Educational Resources page at
www.census.gov/mso/www/training

Using FactFinder to Find Regional Data Across County Lines

Some programs and organizations serve regional communities that include multiple counties, therefore using county specific data does not always work. For example, trying to find data regarding the number of people employed by fisheries in Midcoast Maine calls for piecing together the data from several towns and even counties!

This brief explains how to use the FactFinder to bring together regional data by town so that you can better understand your service area.

Figure 2. Map of Maine Regions

Source: www.maineinns.com/regions

Maine has 16 counties, but different industries have a smaller number of regions and districts that oftentimes encompass more than one county. An example of this is the tourism regions map on the left. This can pose a problem when compiling data for a specific region which may include several towns for more than one county.

Figure 3. Map of Maine Counties

Source: http://geology.com/county-map/maine.shtml

EXPLORE THE DATA!
Now you try! Working through this exercise will help you see how the FactFinder works!

Find and compare baseline housing statistics for Topsham in Sagadahoc County with Brunswick in Cumberland County. These towns border each other and share a regional identity, yet are in different counties.

1. Go to www.factfinder.census.gov - For this exercise, use the "Advanced Search" tool.

2. Select geographies on the left hand side of the web page
- It is more efficient to select your geography of choice before using other filters in advanced search.
- Once in geographies, select "all geographic types."
- Choose the "county subdivision -060" label under "select a geographic type."

> **Research Tip!**
> *Under "select a geographic type," what you choose is really dependent on the type of geographic area you are looking for information on. Since the state of Maine is relatively small in population, almost all of the data regarding our cities, towns, plantations and unorganized townships (UT) can be found under the "county subdivision - 060" label.*

3. Make your geographical and topical selections
- Select "county subdivision – 060"
- Select "Maine" as the state.
- Select the county and town. (For Topsham, it will be Sagadahoc County and Topsham Town.)
- You will have two options: click "add to my selections" or "about this geography." Add Topsham Town to your selections.
- Change the county to Cumberland and select "Brunswick Town" in the geographic areas box. Add Brunswick Town to your selections.

After adding Brunswick to your selections, exit out of the geographies box. Since you probably don't want to have to sift through thousands of those tables just to find data on housing, narrowing the topic selections will help limit the number of tables shown.

Get curious about the data – what do you want to know?

Here is an example of a question you might ask in FactFinder:
How does the number of rental units in Topsham compare to those in Brunswick?

By clicking on Topics - Housing- Count/Estimate - Housing Units, the amount of tables will be limited to 62. Once you find a table you like, click on it!
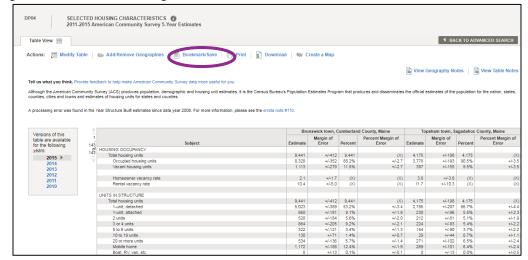
Figure 4. Selected Housing Characteristics: Bookmark to save search!

Explore the data presented. **When finished**, if you want to be able to easily access the table again in the future, select **Bookmark/Save** above the table. You will be provided with a link that you can use to easily find and share the information in the future. This can help you find the same data again when you have to report next time!

Contact Us

For more information about this resource or other helpful data resources, please contact:
Emilie Swenson at emilie.swenson@maine.edu or (207) 228-8295.

The **Data Innovation Project** is located at the University of Southern Maine
Muskie School of Public Service ● Wishcamper Center
34 Bedford Street ● Portland, Maine 04104
www.datainnovationproject.org