Community Data Program

Enabling communities across Canada to measure and track local well-being

Tips on Understanding the CDP Catalogue and Geography

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This is a brief set of tips to help you begin your search in the CDP catalogue.

CDP Data and the CDP Catalogue

The Community Data Program acquires data to supplement and enhance data published by Statistics Canada. The data in the CDP catalogue is customized in one or both of the following ways:

- Geographic area (i.e. smaller or custom geographic areas)
- Custom tabulation (i.e. variables combine in new ways to gain new insights)

> Data is customized by geographic area and custom tabulations

This custom data is better aligned with salient issues at the local level and is connected to the most meaning geographic units like municipalities and neighbourhoods.

Types of Data Tables in the CDP Catalogue

Statistics Canada publishes a census profile for all standard geographic areas. We also order census profiles for all custom geographies. The census profile provides standard information for these geographic areas and includes data on income, education, employment, immigrant status, etc. for people living in the area. When you're not sure where the data you need might be, the census profile is often a good place to start.

If you need basic information at the municipal or provincial level, the census profile on the Statistics Canada website provides quick, html-based access to this information.

> Census profiles are a good place to start

Target group profiles are like the census profile but for a specific group of people. For example, a target group for the francophone population would show the same topics as the census profile, but it would only include the francophone population. Using the target group profiles, you can receive information on the income, education, employment, immigrant status, etc. of the people in the target group.

The CDP also has other custom data tables and Community Poverty Project tables. These custom data tables combine multiple dimensions in the same table and allow users to identify a very specific population or dynamic in the population. Many of these custom data tables are focused on a particular policy issue, such as energy poverty or housing affordability. The custom data tables can be valuable to answer questions for making program decisions or targeting different populations that might be in need for municipal services. The decision of which custom data tables we order is made by a group of CDP users called the Data Purchase and Access Working Group (DPAWG), which is open to all CDP members.

The focus of the CDP is datasets that cover the entire country and provide information for municipalities or smaller geographic areas. In addition to data from Statistics Canada, the catalogue also includes a few data sets from private sources like TransUnion credit and debt data.

Understanding Custom Data Tables

The title of each custom data table shows each of the dimensions present in the dataset. Immediately following the dimension name is a number in brackets, which shows how many items are in the dimension. The number of items in the dimension gives us a hint about what might be in the dimension. For example:

- Language spoken most often at home (8): this dimension has only 8 items, so it must contain only high-level combinations of English, French and non-official languages
- Language spoken most often at home (269): this dimension has 269 items, so it probably provides a comprehensive listing of individual languages

If you were looking for the number of people speaking English most often at home, you would be able to find this information in a table with either of the above dimensions, so you can confidently choose any of the tables that includes a language spoken most often at home dimension. However, if you were looking for the number of people speaking Cantonese most often at home, you can make an educated guess that only the dimensions with 269 items will provide the required information. By paying attention to the dimension names and descriptions, you can save time by only downloading tables that are likely to meet your needs.

Statistics Canada uses all dimension names consistently. Therefore, if you see Age (20), you can be sure that the same age groups will be used each time you see a table with Age (20) included. Sometimes there is more than one dimension on the same topic with the same number of items, in which case Statistics Canada will differentiate using a letter (e.g. Age (4B)).

Beyond 20/20

Beyond 20/20 Professional Browser is a tool for setting up multi-dimensional tables in the configuration appropriate for your analysis. Once the table is set up, you can copy it to excel or another analysis program of your choice. Most tables in the CDP catalogue are in the .ivt format, so you need Beyond 20/20 Professional Browser to open the tables. This software can be downloaded for free on the CDP website or directly from Statistics Canada. Beyond 20/20 is Windows compatible only.

Concept definitions

Check the definitions of all items in Beyond 20/20 to ensure their meaning. For example, you might think that "child" is someone aged under 18 living in a household. But the Statistics Canada definition of "child in a census family" is more complex and is based on relationships and who the person lives with. Statistics Canada use their definitions consistently, but they don't always align with the way we think about them colloquially. Refer to the Census Dictionary and other Statistics Canada documentation to clarify definitions if necessary.

> Check the definitions of all items!

Geography

Statistics Canada standard geographies are predetermined areas that are pre-mapped. They range from very large areas like Canada and the provinces and territories to very small areas like dissemination areas (which include only about 500 people per area). The benefit of these standard geographies is that Statistics Canada can produce a table without any map files from us, so it reduces the cost and time required to produce the table. Unfortunately, the standard geographies don't always align with neighbourhoods and other socially important areas in our local communities. As well, it is often necessary to make a map to understand small standard geographies because they have only numbers, but no names.

Types of Geographic Areas in the CDP Catalogue

Size	Geography	About	When/why to use it
Bigger than a municipality	Province/Territory (PT)		
Bigger than a municipality	Economic regions (ER)	Municipal area and the surrounding rural area	
Bigger than a municipality	Census Divisions (CD)	Municipal area and the surrounding rural area	
Bigger than a municipality	Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	Not every place has a CMA, you have to meet criteria: city in the core with a population and people surrounding it commuting into it each day for work. About 35 of these across the country. Core must be at least 50,000 people.	This can be a useful geographic area because it includes the greater city. Use CMA for information that is not available at the level of the city-proper like the monthly labour force survey results. It works for Calgary, because City of Calgary proper dominates the CMA. If you are a smaller municipal this may not be appropriate. There is lots of information available at this level.
Bigger than a municipality	Census Agglomeration	When more than one municipality are centred on a population core, CAs only need a core population of more than 10,000	Useful if you are covered by CAs like the towns of Lloydminster, AB and Lloydminster, SK.
Equal to a municipality	Census subdivision (CSD)	A municipal area that covers any population size and are named	
(Often) smaller than a municipality	Census tracts (CT)	These cover about 5000 people, so in some cases, this can be larger than a municipality. Not all areas in Canada are covered by CTs.	Use CTs for when you want to use cross-tabulate variables that are not available within our custom geography products because they are similar scale to a neighbourhood, even though they are not exactly neighbourhood boundaries. May not aligned to social organisation, but mapped out can help understand what is happening across a city
Smaller than a municipality	Dissemination Area (DA)	These cover about 500 people.	Use DAs for a finer grain look at a portion of a neighbourhood. These need to be mapped out to be helpful. Great to see patterns around a facility or quadrant of a city. There can be too many of these to look at patterns across a city.
(Often) smaller than a municipality	Forward Sortation Area (FSA)	First three digits of the postal code, maps are available from statistics Canada.	FSAs can be mapped using data from a client if they offer postal codes, can be used as a smaller geography than a municipality, and can be communicated to public.
Smaller than a municipality	Postal codes (points)	Individual point for a six-digit postal code, the transunion data comes in six-digit postal code.	This is hard to map because it comes in points. Maps of area covered by postal codes are proprietary to Canada Post.
(Often) smaller than a municipality	Custom geographies	Map files that statistics Canada does not have. For example, communities or electoral wards. Maps need to be geocoded and submitted to CDP and those are sent to Statistics Canada. These vary between consortia.	Custom geographies are useful to communicate results to stakeholders in a way that is easily understandable. Can use the familiar names and ways we organize ourselves socially.