Gregg Bell, Ph.D.
The University of Alabama

Gregg Bell is a Socioeconomic Analyst at the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) at The University of Alabama. CBER is a university-based research center and is the lead agency for the Alabama State Data Center (ASDC). His duties include managing the state data center program and assisting in the population projections program. The ASDC has no separate funding and no separate offices or staff. CBER was one of the original SDCs established in 1979. Gregg originally worked at CBER during graduate school, where he worked under former ASDC manager, Annette Watters. He returned to CBER as a statistician and economist in 2013.

CBER is also the lead agency for the FSCPP (federal-state cooperative program for population projections) in Alabama. As such, CBER generates population projections for Alabama counties by age, race, and sex. These projections are used as the official projections for the state. CBER also works very closely with Alabama's co-op agency for the estimates program FSCPE). As part of his duties, Gregg attends meetings of both the FSCPE and the FSCPP. The CBER staff, thus, has a great depth of knowledge about Census Bureau programs and data. The Center has a long, strong commitment to the dissemination of public data, and the state data center program at Alabama is one of the strongest in the South, if not the nation.

Gregg currently serves the SDC steering committee as curator of the national Facebook page. His weekly updates via the Berkeley listserv promote and illustrate the work of Census data users across the nation.

1. What do you think the primary role of the National State Data Center Steering Committee is/should be?

The role of the Steering Committee should be to serve as a conduit of information and expertise.

1. The Steering Committee is uniquely positioned to advise the Census Bureau about the concerns of data users. Steering Committee members work with average data users on a daily basis and are thus familiar with the ordinary and common needs of these users. No doubt, Census Bureau officials receive steady, vocal, input from groups with special interests and special needs. The Steering Committee can stand as a reasonable and unbiased voice for the general data user.

2. The Steering Committee has procedures in place to inform data users about the Census Bureau's programs, plans, and activities, both static and changing. This is currently accomplished through email, social media, and in-person meetings. One of the Steering Committee's primary roles is to maintain and continually strengthen these means of distributing information, even while seeking new channels of communication to both the SDC network and beyond.

3. The Steering Committee serves to advocate for state data centers before the Census Bureau. This activity can improve both the quality of and the access to Census data for the entire nation.

4. The Steering Committee serves as a clearinghouse for the exchange of information among state data centers. Since at least the 1980s, state data centers have cooperated with each other to create an array of unique and useful products. An example is the programming efforts that developed profiles from the summary files. There are many other examples of cooperative exchange of information among the states, some of which could not have been possible without a proactive Steering Committee. As both the data and dissemination methods of this data continue to evolve, it is crucial that the Steering Committee continues in this role.

2. What would your primary goal(s) be as a steering committee member?

I am an "experienced novice." While I have 20-plus years of experience in the data arts, only two of these years have been spent in an SDC setting. As such, I bring both expertise to and empathy for the bewildered novice. My work with the SDC Facebook page has given me valuable insights into the needs of our data community and the SDC Steering Committee's role. As part of my tenure on the SDC I would like to develop a start-up document to be given to all SDC Leads and thereafter to all new personnel. My parent organization, CBER, has a long history of institutional support for the state data center, even though the SDC program in Alabama has no separately identified funding. In my relatively short time as SDC lead, I have already consulted and worked with SDCs across the country and have developed cordial working relationships with many other states.

More directly, my primary goal would be to continually improve communications.

1. *To improve communications among state data centers.* While different states have different needs and it may sometimes be difficult for data centers of differing organizational types to empathize with the goals and needs of data centers in different situations, commonalities do exist. The Steering Committee can point to the validity of different approaches to solving problems.
2. *To improve communications between the data centers and the Census Bureau.* Census Bureau priorities and perceptions can be different from those of data centers. Although we may never converge, we need to communicate our positions to each other clearly and without acrimony.
3. *To encourage improved communication and coordination within the Bureau.* Data users sometimes receive mixed signals from different parts of the same agency. If the Steering Committee can gently point out communication areas in need of improvement, everybody wins.

3. What is your vision for the SDC network for 2017 and beyond?

My vision for the future of the SDC network is dynamic and flexible. As data dissemination methods continue to evolve, so must the SDC network. As the steering committee must lead the national network, individual state data centers must guide and inform their respective affiliate networks. Flexibility will be required as the data itself changes, as well. As the ACS adjusts to account for both the real changes in the nation and those imposed by an ever tightening budget environment, our network will be called upon to lead the public data community in response to these changes. Part and parcel to all of this will be the network's role in educating the public to value of Census data. Elected officials, business leaders, educators, and many, many more must understand the critical role that public data plays in all our lives. It will be the task of the SDC network to bring this understanding to realization.

4. What do you think the SDC network can do to add value to Census Data?

A great former Speaker of the House once said, "All politics is local." Our network, from the national steering committee down to the state affiliate can impart local value to Census data. This goes both ways. On the one hand, we can add perceived value to existing Census data by educating local data users on the value and correct use of Census Bureau products. On the other hand, the network can use "boots on the ground" local knowledge to advise and influence both the dissemination of current data and the collection of future data by ensuring relevance from the beginning. On a more mundane level, it must be recognized that the data is of no value of it is not accessible by the people who can benefit from it. The network's role as a liaison between the Census Bureau and data users can communicate the wants, needs, and frustrations of end users.