

# CityScope/MetroScope

## Definitions - April 15, 2011

### Definitions for geographic areas

The CityScope/MetroScope Area Profiling System is constructed on two distinct geographical hierarchies: the census structure, and the community structure.

#### Census Structure

- **Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)** - MSAs are aggregates of counties that can include multiple incorporated places (see below) and cross state lines. MSAs are defined by the federal Office of Management and Budget following each Decennial Census. Counts for MSA component counties will sum to MSA totals, but MSA counts do not sum to any other geographic level.
- **County** - political subdivisions of states. County data sums to the state level.
- **City (Incorporated Place)** - a legally incorporated municipal entity. Places do not cross state lines. No other geographical level sums to place, nor do places sum to any other level.
- **Census Tract** - tracts are county subdivisions whose boundaries are defined co-operatively in the years leading up to each Decennial Census by local authorities and Census Bureau staff. Tract level data sums to county level. Tracts are defined in terms of approximate population size. According to Census Bureau guidelines, the optimal tract size is a population count of around 4,000 persons, with a maximum of 8,000 and a minimum of 1,500. Since tract subdivisions must account for 100 percent of the county which they subdivide, some tracts in low population density areas fall below the minimum, including some with zero population.
- **Census Block Group** - tracts are subdivided into block groups, and block group level data sums to tract level. Historically, block groups are the lowest summary level for which long form (sample) census data is reported, and are currently the lowest summary level reported for the American Community Survey (ACS), which replaces the long form sample beginning with the 2010 Census. Census Bureau guidelines specify optimal block group population at around 1,500 with a maximum of 3,000 and a minimum of 600. In low-density population areas, some block groups can fall below the specified minimums, or have zero population.
- **Census Block** - In high-density population areas, census blocks are defined by the street network. In low-density areas, other geographic features may be utilized as necessary. Census blocks are the lowest summary level for which short form (100 percent count) Decennial Census data is reported.

#### Community Structure

- **City (Incorporated Place)** - see Census Structure definition above
- **Community District** - cities of significant size with the region are subdivided into community districts which are typically aggregated from neighborhoods (see below). Community Districts are defined according to two general principles:
  1. they possess what could be thought of as a “metropolitan” identity; that is, a community district, is likely to be recognizable by name, together with a rough idea of its relative geographic location, to residents throughout the metropolitan area.
  2. they will exhibit some degree of internal homogeneity (and consequently, relative external heterogeneity) with respect to selected socio-economic characteristics

Currently, CityScope maintains community district subdivisions for the cities of Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas. Other regional cities for which community district subdivisions would be useful include Independence and Lee’s Summit in Missouri, and Leawood, Overland Park, Shawnee, Lenexa, and Olathe. Other, smaller places (e.g. Raytown, Gladstone, North Kansas City, Parkville, Riverside, Liberty, etc. in Missouri and Westwood, Roeland Park, Mission Hills, Fairway, Merriam, etc. in Kansas) can be usefully viewed as more or less seamlessly integratable with community district subdivisions of the larger places. The usefulness of this relationship for understanding the spatial distribution of various socio-economic characteristics can be seen in the regional (MetroScope) map service, where the same characteristics for both place and community district levels can be mapped together.

- **Neighborhood** - the idea of “neighborhood” can have many definitions. In CityScope, neighborhoods represent one level of what we call the geographic hierarchy of “community structure.” In principle, neighborhoods are aggregates of residential blocks whose residents share some sense of collective identity as “neighbors.” Given this definition, construction of a definitive neighborhood geography can be problematic.

The City of Kansas City, Missouri, maintains a set of formal neighborhood boundaries, many of which have long-standing historical identities, relationships with each other, and with the City. These definitions serve as the anchor of our neighborhood geography. Community districts for KCMo are aggregates of these neighborhoods. A comparable, formal neighborhood geography does not exist for Kansas City, Kansas; however, that City has established a set of boundaries for areas that are analogous to the community district level aggregated from KCMo neighborhoods. The boundaries for these areas are generally found to be aggregates of census tracts. Therefore, we find ourselves able to establish a seamless community district geography for KCMo and KCKs together; KCMo community districts are subdivided by the formally defined neighborhoods of KCMo, while KCKs community districts are subdivided by census tracts as proxies for neighborhood geography.

Just as we envision the possibility of establishing community district subdivisions in CityScope for other (larger) cities of the incorporated core, we likewise anticipate the opportunity to include additional neighborhood geography for core places when and where it may be available. We are presently aware of a number of places where that might be possible, including Independence and Gladstone in Missouri, and Overland Park in Kansas. We look forward to the opportunity to extend CityScope geographic resources to these and other areas in the future.

- **Social Block** - the concept of a “social block” is significantly different from that of a “census block.” Simply stated, while a census block consists of back-to-back, contiguous properties bounded by street segments, a “social block” generally consists of two discontinuous sets of side-by-side properties facing each other across a street segment. Each of these is often referred to as a block “face.” A census block, therefore, could conceivably consist of up to four distinct block faces, each of which belongs to a different social block. When neighborhood residents speak of the “block” on which they live, it is usually the social block--not the census block--to which they refer.

It is possible to construct a social block geography aggregated from the parcel level (see below). CEI has done this, and we have utilized this geography on occasion in our work with neighborhoods. Social block geography is not implemented in the April 2011 debut of CityScope, but we anticipate its future enhancement in that direction also.

- **Parcel** - parcels represent the legal subdivisions of property ownership. The parcel geography utilized in CityScope originates as the digitized land cadastre constructed and maintained by municipal and county governments. Associated with this geography we have access to extensive city and county property information resources that include such things as property addresses, ownership, land use, assessed values, tax status, code violations, dangerous buildings, etc. Parcels geography can serve to carry and represent any other address-geocoded data available to us, such as CEI’s property conditions survey.

## Other CityScope/MetroScope definitions

**RAAB** (Robbery, Arson, Auto Theft, Burglary) - RAAB is an aggregate crime construct that has been utilized in community safety work as an alternative to standard constructs of Property Crime and Violent Crime. Its construction and use is grounded in the idea that a relatively high incidence of the four RAAB components--robbery, arson, auto theft, and burglary--are more likely than other types of crime to motivate residential abandonment of neighborhoods.

**User-defined Areas** - database extractions are already enabled for customized user-defined selection of system-defined areas (see the CityScope/MetroScope help document for details). Another planned enhancement is the implementation of “User-defined Area Profiling.” This feature will allow CityScope/MetroScope users to define a customized geographic area and obtain its system-generated indicator data profile.