

# APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF THE STANDARDS FOLLOWED IN ESTABLISHING METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS

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This statement summarizes in nontechnical language the official standards for designating and defining metropolitan statistical areas. It omits certain exceptions and unusual situations that are covered in the standards themselves or in the detailed statement of the procedures followed in applying the standards.

## Population Size Requirements for Qualification (Section 1)

To qualify for recognition as a metropolitan statistical area, an area must either have a city with a population of at least 50,000 within its corporate limits, or it must have a U.S. Bureau of the Census urbanized area of at least 50,000 population, *and* a total metropolitan statistical area population of at least 100,000. A few metropolitan statistical areas that do not meet these requirements are still recognized because they qualified in the past under standards that were then in effect.

The Census Bureau defines urbanized areas according to specific criteria, designed to include the densely settled area around each large city. An urbanized area must have a population of at least 50,000. The urbanized area criteria define a boundary based primarily on a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile, but also include some less densely settled areas within corporate limits, and such areas as industrial parks, railroad yards, golf courses, and so forth, if they are adjacent to dense urban development. The density level of 1,000 persons per square mile corresponds approximately to the continuously built-up area around the city, for example, as it would appear in an aerial photograph.

Typically, the entire urbanized area is included within one metropolitan statistical area; however, the metropolitan statistical area is usually much larger in areal extent than the urbanized area, and includes terri-

tory where the population density is less than 1,000 persons per square mile.

## Central County(ies) (Section 2)

Every metropolitan statistical area has one or more central counties. These are the counties in which at least half the population lives in the Census Bureau urbanized area. There are also a few counties classed as central even though less than half their population lives in the urbanized area because they contain a central city (defined in Section 4), or a significant portion (with at least 2,500 population) of a central city.

## Outlying Counties (Section 3)

In addition to the central county(ies), a metropolitan statistical area may include one or more outlying counties. Qualifications an outlying county requires a significant level of commuting from the outlying county to the central county(ies), and a specified degree of "metropolitan character." The specific requirements for including an outlying county depend on the level of commuting of its resident workers to the central county(ies), as follows:

1. Counties with a commuting rate of 50 percent or more must have a population density of at least 25 persons per square mile.
2. Counties with a commuting rate of 40 to 50 percent can qualify if they have a density of at least 35 persons per square mile.
3. Counties with a commuting rate of 25 to 40 percent typically qualify through having either a density of at least 50 persons per square mile, or at least 35 percent of their population classified as urban by the Bureau of Census.
4. Counties with a commuting rate of 15 to 25 percent must have a density of at least 50 persons per square mile, and in

**addition must meet two of the following four requirements:**

- the population density must be at least 60 persons per square mile;
- at least 35 percent of the population must be classified as urban;
- population growth between 1970 and 1980 must be at least 20 percent; and
- a significant portion of the population (either 10 percent or at least 5,000 persons) must live within the urbanized area.

There are also a few outlying counties that qualify for inclusion in a metropolitan statistical area because of heavy commuting from the central county (ies) to the outlying county, or because of substantial total commuting to and from the central counties.

#### **Central Cities (Section 4)**

Every metropolitan statistical area has at least one central city, which is usually its largest city. Smaller cities are also identified as central cities if they have at least 25,000 population and meet certain commuting requirements.

In certain smaller metropolitan statistical areas there are places between 15,000 and 25,000 population that also qualify as central cities, because they are at least one-third the size of the metropolitan statistical area's largest city and meet commuting requirements.

Most places that qualify as central cities are legally incorporated cities. It is also possible for a town in the New England States, New York, or Wisconsin, or a township in Michigan, New Jersey, or Pennsylvania to qualify as a central city. The town or township must, however, be recognized by the Bureau of the Census as a "census designated place" on the basis of being entirely urban in character, and must also meet certain population size and commuting requirements.

#### **Consolidating or Combining Adjacent Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Sections 5 and 6)**

These two sections specify certain conditions under which adjacent metropolitan statistical areas defined by the preceding sections are joined to form a single area. Section 5 consolidates adjacent metropolitan statistical areas if their commuting interchange is at least 15 percent of the number of workers living in the smaller of the two areas. To be consolidated under Section 5, each of the metropolitan statistical areas must also be at least 60 percent urban, and the total population of the consolidated metropolitan statistical area must be at least a million.

Section 6 provides for combining as a single metropolitan statistical area those adjacent metropolitan statistical areas whose largest cities are within 25 miles of each other, unless there is strong evidence, supported by local opinion, that they do not constitute a single area for general social and economic purposes.

#### **Levels (Section 7)**

This section classifies the prospective metropolitan statistical areas defined by the preceding sections into four categories based on total population size: Level A with a million or more; Level B with 250,000 to a million; Level C with 100,000 to 250,000; and Level D with less than 100,000.

Under this section, the metropolitan statistical areas in Levels B, C, and D (those with a population of less than 1 million) receive final designation as metropolitan statistical areas.

#### **Area Titles (Section 8)**

This section assigns titles to the metropolitan statistical areas defined by the preceding sections.

### **Primary and Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Sections 9 through 11)**

Within the metropolitan statistical areas classified as Level A, some areas may qualify for separate recognition as primary metropolitan statistical areas. A primary metropolitan statistical area is a large urbanized county, or cluster of counties, that demonstrates very strong internal economic and social links, in addition to close ties to the other portions of the Level A metropolitan statistical area.

Section 9 through 11 provide a framework for identifying primary metropolitan statistical areas within metropolitan statistical areas of at least 1 million population. A metropolitan statistical area in which primary metropolitan statistical areas have been identified is designated a consolidated metropolitan statistical area.

### **Metropolitan Statistical Areas in New England (Sections 12 through 14)**

These sections provide the basic standards for defining metropolitan statistical areas in New England.

Qualification for recognition as a metropolitan statistical area in New England is on much the same basis as in the other States. A few modifications in the standards are necessary because cities and towns are used for the definitions. In New England each Census Bureau urbanized area of at least 50,000 normally has a separate metropolitan statistical area, provided there is a total metropolitan statistical area population of at least 75,000 or a central city of at least 50,000. The total metropolitan statistical area population requirement is lower than the 100,000 required in the other States because the New England cities and towns used in defining metropolitan statistical areas are much smaller in areal extent than the counties used for the definitions in the other States. This makes it possible to define New England metropolitan statistical areas quite precisely on the basis of

population density and commuting.

For users who prefer definitions in terms of counties, a set of New England County Metropolitan Areas is also officially defined. However, the official metropolitan statistical area designations in New England apply to the city-and-town definitions.

In order to determine the cities and towns which could qualify for inclusion in a New England metropolitan statistical area, section 12 defines a *central core* for each New England urbanized area, consisting essentially of cities and towns in which at least half the population lives in the urbanized area or in a contiguous urbanized area.

Once the central core has been defined, Section 13 reviews the adjacent cities and towns for possible inclusion in the metropolitan statistical area. An adjacent city or town with a population density of at least 100 persons per square mile is included if at least 15 percent of its resident workers commute to the central core. Towns with a density between 60 and 100 persons per square mile also qualify if they have at least 30 percent commuting to the central core. However, the commuting to the central core from the city or town must be greater than to any other central core, and also greater than to any nonmetropolitan city or town.

If a city or town has qualifying commuting in two different directions (e.g., to a central core and to a nonmetropolitan city) and the commuting percentages are within five points of each other, local opinion is solicited through the appropriate congressional delegation before assigning the city or town to a metropolitan statistical area. Some New England communities also qualify for inclusion in a metropolitan statistical area on the basis of reverse commuting or total commuting.

Once the qualifying outlying towns and cities have been determined, Section 14 qualifies the resulting area as a metropolitan statistical area provided it has a city of at

least 50,000 or a total population of at least 75,000. This section also specifies that several of the standards used in the other States are also applied to the New England States:

1. The central cities of each area are determined by Section 4.
2. Two adjacent New England metropolitan statistical areas may be consolidated under Section 5.
3. New England areas are categorized into levels according to Section 7A. Those in Levels B, C, and D are given final designation as metropolitan statistical areas, and are assigned titles according to Section 8.

**Primary and Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas in New England (Sections 15 and 16)**

Section 15 is used to review each Level A metropolitan statistical area in New England for the possible identification of primary

metropolitan statistical areas. It follows the same general approach as is used for identifying such areas outside New England (Section 9). Finally, Section 16 provides that level and titles for New England primary and consolidated metropolitan statistical areas are determined by much the same standards as for the remaining States.

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Note: OMB is reviewing the **MSA standards and will publish them with some revisions before Apr. 1, 1990 (12).**

SOURCE: Excerpt from "The Metropolitan Statistical Area Classification: 1980 Official Standards and Related Documents," The Federal Committee on Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.