

Thomas Vought, Missouri

1) Brief biography.

I am currently the data and operations manager of the Missouri Spatial Data Information Center, an office of the University of Missouri and the Missouri Census Data Center. In this capacity, I am responsible for ensuring that MSDIS continues to deliver the latest, most accurate mapping data and high resolution imagery to Missouri's professional GIS community. MSDIS currently distributes data from a variety of state agencies, including Missouri-specific TIGER data from the US Census Bureau. In addition to data distribution, MSDIS also facilitates the distribution of GIS-related information through a variety of state and regional listservs, maintains a page for local GIS job advertisements, and conducts workshops related to GIS metadata.

2) What special perspective or goals would the nominee bring as a Steering Committee member?

As a GIS professional, much of my perspective on Census Data is shaped by TIGER data, which often form the backbone of many spatial queries and mapping projects. Census data are some of the most commonly downloaded data from MSDIS and I frequently find myself directing people to our TIGER data resources when they call or email MSDIS asking about how best to begin a GIS-based project. While these data are invaluable, I am concerned by the number of people I find who are entirely unaware of their availability. Whether it is someone who has never heard of TIGER data, or someone who tried to navigate the American Fact Finder website and quit, I am concerned by how many people believe that Census data are unavailable to the general public. If I were to serve on the Steering Committee, my primary goal would be to ensure that there is a voice of support for making Census data, both tabular and spatial, more readily available to the general public.

3) What is your vision for the SDC network and our partnership with the Census Bureau?

My vision for the relationship between the SDC network and the Census Bureau is one of continued communication between the two entities. Recently it has come to my attention that the GIS metadata available for the 2018 TIGER data are not currently compatible with the metadata standards employed by many of Missouri's state agencies and built into the more commonly used GIS software packages. The metadata are available as text files but their formatting is not natively supported by the software that many GIS professionals use to read and edit spatial data documentation. While this is a relatively minor concern that can almost certainly be resolved with the correct metadata translation patch, it is concerning that such an important data source is, for the time being, lacking proper metadata documentation. I believe that establishing closer bonds between the SDC and the Census Bureau would be beneficial in preventing similar surprises from occurring in the future.