Frequently asked questions

1. How do the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau determine if they can collect and report on an occupation? (See Classification Principle 9.)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) develops estimates of occupational employment and wages, by wage and salary workers in nonfarm establishments in its Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey. This survey collects information from business establishments sampled by industry and geographic area. The information provided by employers on their workers' job titles and job descriptions must be distinct and sufficient to classify into a single occupation. If employers do not provide information to classify workers into a proposed occupation, that occupation would not be collectable for the OES program. BLS looks at the definition, and at the size and dispersion of (estimated) employment, in determining whether it can collect and report data on an occupation. If the occupation is widely dispersed across areas and/or industries, employment in an occupation must be sizeable to be reliably measured. If the occupation is highly concentrated in a single industry or area, smaller levels of employment can be reliably measured.

The Census Bureau develops estimates of occupational employment of the population with its household-based Current Population Survey (a joint program with BLS) and American Community Survey. As with the BLS collection procedures, the Census Bureau is concerned about the size and dispersion of employment in an occupation in determining if it can collect and report reliable data on that occupation. In addition, the Census Bureau considers whether the respondents to its household surveys, who may provide information for themselves as well as for other household members, are likely to report the job titles and job activities associated with an occupation accurately and completely. Household survey respondents tend to give general or informal, rather than specific or technical, occupational titles. For example, a household survey respondent may report "doctor," rather than "pediatrician." This makes it difficult for the Census Bureau to report on such specialized occupations.

2. What is the difference between an occupation and a job?

When reviewing and evaluating individual proposals, the SOCPC considered the degree to which a proposed addition relates to a job rather than an occupation. In many cases, job titles intrinsically represent jobs, rather than true occupations as defined in the SOC. Specifically, a job is a set of work activities performed by an individual. The exact set of activities varies depending on the size and organization of the establishment and is often, but not always, unique to that individual worker. An occupation is a grouping of a number of individual jobs. Thus, an occupational definition is a collective description of a number of similar individual jobs performed, with minor variations, in different establishments. Occupational classification schemes such as the SOC organize millions of jobs into discrete occupations on the basis of their similarities as determined by the schemes' classification principles. For example, in the 2018 SOC, workers with the job title "Coronary Care Unit Staff Nurse" are classified in the 2018 SOC occupation "Registered Nurses (29-1141)." Likewise, workers with the job title "Automotive Fuel Injection Servicer" are classified in the 2018 SOC occupation Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics (49-3023).

3. Why doesn't every job title have its own code in the SOC?

Occupational classification schemes examine and organize the millions of jobs and tens of
thousands of job titles in the economy into occupations based upon their similarities as
determined by the scheme's classification principles. The organizing principle of the SOC
system is work performed rather than job title so there are many fewer occupation codes in the
SOC than there are jobs in the economy.

4. What is the difference between the SOC Classification Principles and the Coding Guidelines?

The SOC Classification Principles form the basis on which the SOC system is structured. The
Coding Guidelines are intended to assist SOC users in consistently assigning SOC occupational
codes to survey responses.

5. Who uses the SOC?

Government agencies that collect and publish occupational statistical data use the SOC. See FAQ
number 6 for more detail. At the federal level, these agencies and programs include:

> Department of Commerce
> > Census Bureau
> Department of Defense
> Department of Education
> Department of Health and Human Services
> Department of Labor
> > Bureau of Labor Statistics
> > > Employment Projections Program
> > > Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey
> > > National Compensation Survey
> > > National Longitudinal Surveys
> > > Occupational Employment Statistics
> > > Occupational Health and Safety Statistics
> > > Occupational Requirements Survey
> > Employment and Training Administration
> > Employment Standards Administration
> Department of Transportation
> > Bureau of Transportation Statistics
> Department of Veterans Affairs
> > National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics
> Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
> National Science Foundation
> > National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics
> Office of Personnel Management

6. Where can I get information on the occupations in the SOC?

Depending on the type of information you are seeking, you may obtain information from several agencies:

a) The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program produces cross-industry occupational employment and wage estimates for the nation, all states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, metropolitan areas, metropolitan divisions, and nonmetropolitan areas. (See https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm). OES also publishes national industry-specific occupational employment and wage estimates for sectors and three-, four-, and selected five-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industries. For assistance with these data, contact the OES program at (202) 691-6569 or send an email to oesinfo@bls.gov. Industry-specific occupational data for states are available from BLS as a research data set. Metropolitan and nonmetropolitan area industry data may be available from the state workforce agencies by contacting the individual state or states for which information is needed. Contact information for the state workforce agencies is available at https://www.bls.gov/bls/ofolist.htm.

b) The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections (EP) program produces 10-year projections of employment by occupation and industry for the nation as a whole. BLS national projections are shared with state workforce agencies to produce state and local area projections. In addition, EP publishes two career information publications that provide narrative descriptions of occupations: the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (https://www.bls.gov/ooh) and *Career Outlook* (https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook). For more information about these data and publications, visit https://www.bls.gov/emp or contact the program at ep-info@bls.gov or (202) 691-5700.

c) The Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Compensation Survey (NCS) program provides comprehensive measures of job requirements and occupational compensation. Its Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS) component gathers job-related information regarding physical demands, environmental conditions, mental and cognitive demands, and vocational preparation requirements at the detailed occupational level. Its Compensation Levels and Trends component publishes changes and levels of labor costs, as well as the incidence and provisions of employer-provided benefits, by worker and establishment characteristics. The OES and NCS are combined to produce the Bureau's Modeled Wage Estimates, which provide annual estimates of average hourly wages for occupations by selected job characteristics and within geographical locations. For more information, see the main program pages at https://www.bls.gov/ncs/, https://www.bls.gov/ors/, and http://www.bls.gov/mwe or call (202) 691-6199, or email NCSInfo@bls.gov. Correspondence may be sent to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey, 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE., Room 4160, Washington, DC 20212-0001.

d) The Current Population Survey (CPS), a joint program of the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, uses the Census occupational classification system, which is derived from the Standard Occupational Classification. CPS data series are available on this classification beginning with the year 2011. The 2010 Census occupational classification was introduced with CPS data for January 2011 and replaced an earlier version that was based on the 2000

SOC. Historical data were not revised. As a result, CPS occupational data beginning with January 2011 are not strictly comparable with earlier years. The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes national-level estimates of occupational employment, unemployment, and earnings with demographic detail from the CPS. The CPS homepage on the BLS website is at https://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm; contact information for the BLS CPS program can be found at https://www.bls.gov/cps/contact.htm.

e) The U.S. Census Bureau publishes occupational data annually, collected through the American Community Survey (ACS), for the nation, all states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all counties and places with populations of at least 65,000. The Census Bureau also publishes 5-year ACS data for all geographies in the United States and Puerto Rico. Census 2020 will collect, classify, and publish occupational data for Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Other household surveys publish occupational data at varying levels of detail and geography. Standard tabulations are available through the American FactFinder at http://www.factfinder.census.gov. Information about occupation coding and written reports on occupational trends can be found at https://www.census.gov/people/io/. For additional information, contact the Census Bureau's Question and Answer Center at http://ask.census.gov or contact the Call Center at (301) 763-INFO.

f) The Department of Defense publishes data that cross-reference military occupational codes of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard with civilian equivalent occupations. Additional information on available data products can be obtained at https://www.dmdc.osd.mil; or by writing to Director, Defense Manpower Data Center, 1600 Wilson Blvd., Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22209-2593.

g) The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses the SOC to code occupational data on a national sample of adults in its Adult Training and Education Survey, which examines adults' attainment of professional certifications and licenses and their participation in work-experience programs. The SOC is also used in the National Teacher and Principal Survey to code the employment of elementary and secondary teachers prior to their entry to teaching and after they leave teaching. NCES also uses the SOC to code staff at postsecondary education institutions, collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Finally, NCES conducts various longitudinal studies that follow high school and college students into their working years and uses the SOC to classify their occupations. Data, reports, and other products based on these data collections are available at http://nces.ed.gov.

h) The Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Occupational Information Network (O*NET) system is a comprehensive database of occupational competency profiles. ETA sponsors the development, updating, and dissemination of O*NET information through a grant with the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. The O*NET system is based on the SOC system and also provides information on additional detailed occupations within an SOC category in selected instances. The O*NET Content Model of occupational descriptors is the foundation for a series of survey questionnaires that go out to incumbent workers in various occupations, which form the basis for the O*NET occupational

competency profiles. The O*NET system is the successor to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which was last published by the Department of Labor in 1991. O*NET information is available at https://online.onetcenter.org and also as a downloadable electronic database from the O*NET Resource Center: https://www.onetcenter.org/database.html. For more information, contact O*NET Customer Support at onet@ncmail.net or contact the Department of Labor at o-net@dol.gov. You can also write to the O*NET project director at Office of Workforce Investment, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, FPB Room S 4231, 200 Constitution Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20210.

i) The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) uses SOC occupational classifications, and equivalent Census occupational classifications, to create broader categories as part of the Commission's data survey and enforcement programs. Under the survey program, employer workforce information is collected periodically from private sector firms on the Employer Information Report (EEO-1) and public sector employers on the State and Local Government Report (EEO-4). More information may be obtained at https://www.eeoc.gov.

j) The National Science Foundation (NSF) National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) website provides access to the Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT), a comprehensive and integrated system of information about the employment, educational, and demographic characteristics of scientists and engineers in the United States. It is intended for both policy analysis and general research, having features for both the casual and more intensive data user. More information may be obtained from the SESTAT at https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sestat.

7. Whom should I contact if I have a question about the SOC?

For questions about how the SOC is used in specific programs, contact the program. For specific questions about the SOC you may call the SOC information line at 202-691-6500 or send an email to SOC@bls.gov.

8. Why are there different levels of detail in the SOC?

The four-tiered levels in the SOC enable users to choose the level or levels of detail corresponding to their interest and ability to collect data on different occupations. Users needing different levels of detail will still be able to compare data at the defined levels. Approved modifications to the structure allow for alternative levels of aggregation.

9. Why can't I find my job title in the SOC?

This manual lists occupations that include workers with many different job titles. It does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of job titles. Often, a job title can be found in more than one occupation or occupational group (ex. "Team Supervisor"). When a job title is found in only one occupation, it may be included in a list of additional titles called the Direct Match Title File, which is available at https://www.bls.gov/soc. If your title is not listed, you may email

SOC@bls.gov to suggest its inclusion. Instructions for submitting your recommendation, and other files related to the Direct Match Title File, are also available on that website.

10. Which occupations in the SOC cover "professionals"?

The 2018 SOC does not classify or identify workers using the term "professional." The SOC covers all workers who work for pay or profit and does not cover occupations unique to volunteers. The SOC does not use other similar terms such as "white collar," "blue collar," "skilled," or "unskilled." The SOC was created solely for statistical purposes (See FAQ number 12.), and the classification structure is not intended to rank or group occupations by education, credentials, earnings, or any other similar user-defined indicator of status. However, government agencies or private users may define and use various terms to suit their own purposes. For example, the Employment and Training Administration's O*NET program classifies occupations into 1 of 5 "job zones," based on data regarding the levels of education, experience, and training needed for work in an occupation, ranging from "little or no" to "extensive" preparation. A detailed report on the procedure for using O*NET survey data and other information to assign job zones to O*NET occupations is available at: http://www.onetcenter.org/reports/JobZoneProcedure.html.

11. Why are supervisors of workers in Major Groups 13-0000 through 31-0000 not listed? Where should they be classified?

Supervisors of workers in Major Groups 13-0000 through 29-0000 are classified with the occupations they supervise because they generally have the same type of training, education, and experience as the workers they supervise. Classification Principle 4 states that these supervisors are classified with the workers they supervise. Supervisors of workers in Major Group 31-0000 are usually classified in Major Group 29-0000. See Classification Principles 5.

12. How are workers classified into occupations under the SOC system? Can the SOC provide classification determinations for nonstatistical purposes, such as prevailing wages?

The SOC Coordinating Team is often asked about coding occupations for reasons that are not statistical in nature, such as for prevailing wage determinations. The SOC was developed for use by federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the specific purpose of producing statistical data. The SOC Coordinating Team can provide guidance that is in accordance with the 2018 SOC Classification Principles and Coding Guidelines. However, this guidance is solely to help users of statistical data find workers who perform a specific set of work activities or to help statistical data collectors. The SOC Coordinating Team cannot make official classification determinations for nonstatistical purposes, such as prevailing wages. It is up to customers using the SOC for nonstatistical purposes to review the detailed definitions for the SOC codes and determine the best match, in light of their own program and policy purposes. Such users are not limited to following the SOC classification principles and guidelines used by federal statistical agencies. For example, users may develop their own policies concerning workers that meet the definition of two or more occupations.

Under the SOC system, workers are classified into occupations based on their job duties, not their job titles. Workers with the same title may be classified in different occupations, based on their individual job duties.

The best way to proceed is to look at the various definitions for the SOC codes and determine which best matches the work being performed. Starting with the major group level, you can examine more and more specific groups from minor groups to detailed occupations. Definitions are available only at the detailed occupation level, which is indicated by a code ending in a number other than 0. Workers who do not perform activities described in any distinct detailed occupation are included in an appropriate ("All Other") occupation. The "All Other" occupations appear as the last occupation in a group and are indicated by a code ending in the number 9.

More information on using the SOC to classify workers can be found in the 2018 SOC Classification Principles and Coding Guidelines. The Classification Principles form the basis on which the SOC system is structured. The Coding Guidelines are intended to assist users in the federal statistical agencies in consistently assigning SOC codes and titles to survey responses and in other coding activities.

Warranting specific mention are Classification Principles 1 and 2, as well as Coding Guideline 2. Classification Principle 1 states that "Each occupation is assigned to only one occupational category at the most detailed level of the classification." Classification Principle 2 states that "Occupations are classified based on work performed and, in some cases, on the skills, education, and/or training needed to perform the work." Coding Guideline 2 states that "When workers in a single job could be coded in more than one occupation, they should be coded in the occupation that requires the highest level of skill. If there is no measurable difference in skill requirements, workers should be coded in the occupation in which they spend the most time."

The 2018 SOC was designed solely for statistical purposes. Although it is likely that the 2018 SOC also will be used for various nonstatistical purposes (e.g., for administrative, regulatory, or taxation functions), the requirements of government agencies or private users that choose to use the 2018 SOC for nonstatistical purposes have played no role in its development, nor will OMB modify the classification to meet the requirements of any nonstatistical program. Consequently, the 2018 SOC is not to be used in any administrative, regulatory, or tax program unless the head of the agency administering that program has first determined that the use of such occupational definitions is appropriate to the implementation of the program's objectives.

13. Where can I find how the 2018 SOC relates to the 2010 SOC?

The official crosswalks can be found at https://www.bls.gov/soc. Occupations are crosswalked from the 2018 SOC to the 2010 SOC and from the 2010 SOC to the 2018 SOC.

14. When will federal statistical agencies begin using the 2018 SOC in survey collection?

Federal statistical agencies will begin using the 2018 SOC for occupational data they publish for reference years beginning on or after January 1, 2018. However, it is important to note that for some programs, full implementation of the 2018 SOC will occur in stages, as sufficient data are needed to produce estimates at the full level of occupational detail. Contact an agency or

program directly for specific information on implementation. A schedule of implementation dates for programs within the Bureau of Labor Statistics will be available at https://www.bls.gov/soc.

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