This tutorial explains the four stages of IPEDS data release. Understanding these stages is important when accessing data from the IPEDS Use the Data Center, as the version of data you are reading or analyzing may have implications for how you interpret the information. For example, when utilizing the IPEDS Use the Data Center, you have the option to select preliminary or provisional data—two different stages of data release. Understanding the differences between the data options is important for accurate data analysis.

Let’s take a look at the four stages of IPEDS data release and learn more about the differences. Once IPEDS data are submitted through the IPEDS Data Collection System, there are four stages to data release:

• Collection Level Data;
• Preliminary Data;
• Provisional Data; and
• Final Data.

The first stage, collection level data, includes data that have been submitted and locked by the IPEDS Keyholder, reviewed by the Help Desk, and migrated to the Collection Level Data Center. These data have not been cleaned or reviewed by the IPEDS Help Desk. Once data are migrated to the Collection Level Data Center, any keyholder whose data have already been migrated can see their own data, as well as the data for all of the other institutions that have already been migrated.

The second stage, Preliminary Data, occurs after the IPEDS data collection cycle closes. These data are made available through the IPEDS Use the Data portal. Preliminary data have been edited but are subject to further NCES quality control procedures. For example, imputed data for non-responding institutions have not yet been included.

Provisional Data, the third stage, are available after all quality control procedures are complete and data have been imputed for non-responding institutions. Provisional data are made available through the IPEDS Use the Data portal.
The last stage, Final Data, includes institutional revisions to data in the subsequent data collection year through the prior year revision system. For example, editing 2017-18 Completions data during the 2018-19 collection cycle. After these revised data are reviewed, final data are made available through the IPEDS Use the Data Center.

You may be wondering when preliminary and provisional data are accessible. These become available in time frames according to the data collection windows. Although unexpected delays in the approval process can occur, the goal of NCES is to maintain or improve the timelines of data release on an annual basis.

For example, the preliminary data for the fall survey components, which include Institutional Characteristics-Header, Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and Completions, are available in mid-to-late May following the collection.

The winter survey component data, which include Student Financial Aid, Graduation Rates, 200% Graduation Rates, Admissions, and Outcome Measures, are available in early-to-mid October following the collection.

Finally, spring survey component data for the Human Resources, Finance, Fall Enrollment, and Academic Libraries components are available in early-to-mid October following the collection.

In addition, the Provisional data are available approximately 4-6 weeks after the preliminary data release.

When all four stages of data release are viewed together, it provides a clearer picture of how IPEDS data are cleaned and made available to the public. These differences are important for data submitters and users to know, especially when accessing data from the IPEDS Use the Data Center.

For more information on the IPEDS Data Release schedule and publications, please contact the IPEDS Help Desk.