

LOOKING TO CENSUS 2030

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM CENSUS 2020 PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

OCTOBER 2021

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The photos included in this report are examples of just some of the work in communities across the country who were partners with the Census Bureau in working towards a fair and accurate count. They show the persistence, creativeness, partnering and heart that went into working on the count of the entire country during a global pandemic. Photos are from APIA Vote (p. 1, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 34, 42, 48), Arab American Institute (p. 3, 43), Bauman Foundation (p. 69), Count Me In WV Coalition/WV Healthy Kids and Families (p. 10, 31, 57), Fair Count (p. 20, 28, 63), Fair Immigration Reform Movement (p. 11, 23, 27, 33, 38, 40, 52, 54, 56, 62, 68, 71), GALEO #IamGALEO (p. 24, 50, 51), Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (p. 19, 55, 67), Jolt Initiative (p. 2, 22, 25), the Oklahoma Policy Initiative (p. 45, 47, 72) and Wallace H. Coulter Foundation (p. 29, 40, 59).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Karen K. Narasaki served as a consultant to the Bauman Foundation, which helped to staff the collaborative and whose Executive Director, Gary Bass, served as chair of the collaborative. She was President and Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC when it led the national outreach campaign for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Census 2000 and Census 2010. She also served on the Census Bureau's 2010 Census Advisory Committee. Tim Lim, President of Lim Consulting Strategies provided digital communications training and technical assistance to members of the Census Counts campaign and assisted grantees with their paid advertising strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

THE DEMOCRACY FUNDERS CENSUS SUBGROUP IS A COLLABORATIVE OF ABOUT A dozen national and regional foundations that came together in 2015 to develop a plan to support efforts to achieve a fair and accurate 2020 Census. At the conclusion of 2020 Census counting initial data processing operations, the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup commissioned Karen K. Narasaki, the principal author of this report, and Tim Lim, President of Lim Consulting Strategies who authored the section on the Bureau's advertising campaign, to prepare a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations to the U.S. Census Bureau; the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Bureau's parent department; Congress, which has constitutional responsibility for the census; and the Administration. The goal of this report is to provide insights from the experiences of national, state and local funders and nonprofit organizations and government leaders who worked to engage communities most at risk of being undercounted in Census 2020, as planning begins in earnest for Census 2030 and as the Census Bureau continues to refine the related American Community Survey.

The collaborative recruited over 100 funders who contributed more than \$117 million to support a national plan of action focused on outreach and education to communities historically undercounted and at risk for being undercounted in 2020. The funding raised by the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup supported over 260 organizations across the country, including the 2020 Census Counts campaign housed at the Leadership Conference Education Fund. The campaign was chaired by Vanita Gupta, then CEO of The Leadership Conference; Arturo Vargas, CEO of the NALEO Educational Fund; and John Yang, the President and CEO of Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC.) The campaign coordinated a coalition of national organizations as well as a network of state and local organizations from every state in the country, many of which were funded by the collaborative and its members. In addition to Get Out the Count (GOTC) training and materials, the collaborative funded policy advocacy, research, communications, and coordination. The Census Subgroup also worked closely with the Funders Census Initiative (FCI) at the Funders Committee for Civic Participation, which partnered with the United Philanthropy Forum to coordinate and provide technical assistance and informational resources to state and local funders and philanthropic-serving organizations working to support organizations at the state and local level.

Many staff from philanthropy and from the nonprofit organizations they supported also helped to organize, lead, or participate in Complete Count Committees. Some even served as enumerators. Congressional, state and local government leaders also participated in webinars and briefings organized by the funders and the Census Counts campaign. The network supported by the funders included many of the nation's foremost experts on the census.

The report is based on interviews, listening sessions, reports from grantees and Complete Count Committees and the experience of the primary author, who also served as the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup official contact to the Census Bureau and as an advisor to the Funders Census Initiative and the United Philanthropy Forum. A fairly representative sample of about 60 individuals from national, regional, state and local funders, philanthropic serving organizations and nonprofits, as well as members of Complete Count Committees, participated in one-on-one interviews or one of three listening sessions. The report is a compilation of hundreds of findings, and not every finding or recommendation represents the view of every group or individual, although there is a broad consensus on many of them.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LOOKING TO CENSUS 2030: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2020 CENSUS

Partners and Funders is a report commissioned by the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup, a collaborative of about a dozen national and regional foundations that came together in 2015 to develop and fund a plan to support efforts to achieve a fair and accurate 2020 Census, with a focus especially on communities historically undercounted and most at risk of being undercounted in 2020. These communities include Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, immigrants, low-income households, people with disabilities, young children under the age of 5, people who have limited English proficiency, and LGBTQ+ individuals. The report is a compilation of findings and offers over 100 recommendations from funders, philanthropy serving organizations, community-based organizations and other stakeholders, including complete count committees from across the country, who worked with the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup and the Census Counts Campaign housed at the Leadership Conference Education Fund.

In 2021, the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup commissioned Karen K. Narasaki, the principal author of this report, and Tim Lim, President of Lim Consulting Strategies, the principal author of the section on Communications, to prepare a comprehensive set of findings about the conduct of the 2020 Census and recommendations for Census 2030 and the American Community Survey based on those findings. The analysis includes very specific observations, as well as suggestions for broad, and in some cases, very significant shifts in the way the Bureau has approached its mission over the past three censuses. The contributors to this report hope that the U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, Congress, and the Administration seriously consider these findings and lessons learned as planning begins for Census 2030 and the Bureau continues to refine the related American Community Survey.

This Executive Summary provides a short background and highlights the major recommendations outlined in the report.

BACKGROUND

The Democracy Funders Census Subgroup recruited over 100 funders who contributed more than \$117 million over four years to support a national plan of action focused on outreach and education to historically undercounted communities which were at risk for being undercounted in 2020. The Subgroup focused on Census Bureau policies intended to achieve a fair and accurate count. The Democracy Funders Census Subgroup funding supported over 260 organizations across the country, including the 2020 Census Counts campaign housed at the Leadership Conference Education Fund. The campaign was co-chaired by Vanita Gupta, then President and Chief Executive Officer of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; Arturo Vargas, Chief Executive Officer of the NALEO Educational Fund; and John Yang, the President and Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC).



The campaign coordinated a coalition of over 30 national organizations as well as a network of state and local organizations from every state in the country, many of which were funded by the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup collaborative and its members. In addition to national Get Out the Count (GOTC) training, technical assistance, and informational materials, the collaborative funded policy advocacy, research, communications, and coordination. The GOTC initiative included a Census Equity Fund that provided \$13.7 million to state and local outreach efforts in 28 states plus Washington, DC and Puerto Rico. The Census Subgroup also worked closely with the Funders Census Initiative (FCI) at the Funders Committee for Civic Participation, which partnered with the United Philanthropy Forum to coordinate and provide technical assistance and informational resources to state and local funders and philanthropic serving organizations working to support organizations at the state and local levels. These funders and PSOs provided roughly \$75 million dollars (\$30 million of which was raised by California funders) for state and local organizations and initiatives, many of them working in close partnership with state and local governments.

Many staff and board members from philanthropy and from the nonprofit organizations they supported also helped to organize, lead or participate in Complete Count Committees. Some had friends and family members working as census takers. Congressional, state, and local government leaders also participated in webinars and briefings organized by the funders and the Census Counts campaign. The contributors to this report from this network include many of the nation's foremost experts on various aspects of the census.

The report is based on interviews, listening sessions, reports from grantees and Complete Count Committees, a survey, and the experience of the primary author, who also served as the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup official contact to the Census Bureau and as an advisor to the Funders Census Initiative. A fairly representative sample of about 60 individuals from national, regional, state and local funders, philanthropic serving organizations and nonprofits, as well as members of Complete Count Committees, participated in one-on-one interviews or one of three listening sessions. The report is a compilation of hundreds of findings, and not every finding or recommendation represents the view of every group or individual, although there is a broad consensus on many of them.

The Census Bureau is conducting its own evaluations of 2020 Census planning and operations. In addition, there is discussion about whether or to what extent the basic approach to the census should be overhauled, given continued population growth and diversification, increasing concerns over privacy, and waning interest in survey participation, as well as both the opportunities and the challenges of technological advances and seismic shifts to media platforms. The report is organized around the various policy and operational buckets that currently shape the census:

- A. Census Content and Rules**
- B. Census Preparations**
- C. Language Assistance**
- D. Partnership Programs**
- E. Communications Campaign**
- F. Peak Census Operations (including response options, rural areas, census workers and Nonresponse follow-up, special enumerations)**
- G. Additional Research**



A

CENSUS CONTENT AND RULES

There are nine questions on the census form, covering six topics (including a household count). As the population continues to diversify, the most challenging questions relate to collecting data on race and ethnicity. The Bureau had tested and recommended several changes to the race and ethnicity questions, that would have required revisions to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget standards on collecting and publishing race and ethnicity data in advance of the 2020 Census. These included the addition of a Middle Eastern North African category and a combined race and Hispanic origin question. In addition, the Bureau was preparing to move forward on recommendations for additional questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the American Community Survey. The Bureau also had been exploring changes to the residence criteria for people incarcerated at the time of the census.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- use a combined race and Hispanic origin question for the 2030 Census and the ACS, once the Office of Management and Budget has revised the federal standards for collecting and publishing data on race and ethnicity to allow a one-question format;
- offer a new Middle Eastern and North African category in a combined race and ethnicity question;
- recommend additional questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the American Community Survey and for Census 2030;
- conduct research on whether the question on sex should be expanded to offer more than two options;
- confirm that it will not include questions on citizenship or immigration status in Census 2030;
- revise the Residence Criteria and Situations for the 2030 Census to enumerate incarcerated persons, including detained juveniles, at their last home address prior to incarceration.

B

CENSUS PREPARATIONS

The report describes the problems experienced during the GOTC efforts that might have been identified and addressed during more comprehensive tests of operations, outreach, and communications but Congress failed to sufficiently fund that effort. The report suggests actions the Bureau should take to improve the accuracy of the Master Address File, which establishes the enumeration universe. LUCA is currently voluntary on the part of state and local governments because federal funding does not support that work.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Congress should ensure that the Census Bureau has timely and sufficient funding to conduct comprehensive testing of its planned operations, advertising campaign, and outreach activities, including a dress rehearsal in multiple, diverse sites, as well as additional tests in Puerto Rico, on American Indian reservations and Tribal lands, and in rural areas.
- The Department of Commerce should propose, and Congress should fund, a program to help state, local and Tribal governments defray the cost of participating in the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) operation.

To improve the accuracy of the Master Address File, the Census Bureau should:

- educate and engage community-based stakeholder organizations in the LUCA operation more effectively and develop best practices to help address listers, as well as state and local LUCA participants, to identify nontraditional housing;
- research and address the proliferation of nonstandard housing in MAF-verification activities and ensure inclusion of non-city style addresses in rural areas, particularly on Tribal lands;
- reconsider the scope of the In-Field Address Canvassing operation, to ensure accurate identification of nonstandard housing;
- develop more effective ways to reconcile addresses for the same housing unit before and during peak operations, to reduce repeat visits by census field staff.



LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

One in five people living in the U.S. over the age of five speaks a language other than English as their first language. The report contains numerous findings and recommendations to ensure that historically undercounted households whose members speak a language other than English at home can be counted more accurately. The Census Bureau collected census information and deployed paid advertising in 13 non-English languages in 2020, basing the language selections on national Limited English Proficient (LEP) numbers. This approach fails to address the reality that ethnic communities whose population is small nationally may be much more significant on the state or local level. None of the languages used were indigenous. Providing greater language assistance will make it easier for more people to self-respond, thereby saving significant follow-up costs as well as increasing the accuracy of the collected data. Increased, targeted in-language advertising will make it clearer that everyone should respond. The number of languages the Bureau provides is insufficient to address the persistent undercounts of people of color who are immigrants or indigenous people. Because the Bureau does not adequately meet these needs, the task falls onto state and local governments and community-based organizations who are less able to efficiently provide what is necessary. A vast increase in the number of languages it employs for official forms, telephone assistance, paid advertising, outreach materials, mobile questionnaire assistance and staffing is needed.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- vastly increase the number of languages it employs for official forms, telephone assistance, paid advertising, outreach materials, and staffing;
- determine language assistance priorities based on an evaluation of the language needs of each county, rather than solely at the national level and take into consideration languages spoken at home, as well as limited-English-speaking households, in creating a formula that would yield additional languages for paper questionnaires and telephone assistance;
- offer the on-line response option in all languages for which 2020 Census language guides were prepared, as well as in additional indigenous languages;
- develop an assistance program for small language populations with high rates of limited English proficiency, including recent arrivals through the U.S. refugee program;
- have targets for bilingual hiring that match local needs, and seek a permanent waiver for hiring work-authorized bilingual noncitizens to meet language assistance needs in a timely, comprehensive way;

- develop and implement, in concert with Tribal governments and Indigenous communities, a comprehensive language assistance program for American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders;
- promote more widely the availability of translated materials and language assistance, including through targeted paid advertising, and more effectively test the quality of translated materials across different geographies;
- hire bilingual staff through Regional Census Offices who can be deployed to supplement the work of bilingual partnership specialists and enumerators assigned to specific locations; and match the hiring of bilingual enumerators and partnership specialists to the needs of each community, and provide greater transparency in staffing goals and gaps so that community advocates can more effectively assist the Bureau with recruitment efforts;
- examine and strengthen its language access program for the American Community Survey and other surveys where race and ethnicity are an important focus of the research or an important factor in the legitimacy of the data overall.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

The Census Bureau expanded its investment in various partnership programs for 2020 after evaluations determined that the 2010 expansion had helped boost self-response and reduce overall costs. However, stakeholders strongly believe that the Bureau can no longer rely on a model that primarily relies on a massive “seasonal” one-year push every decade requiring a steep ramp up in resources. The barriers to persuading households to participate are likely to continue to grow in the form of declining public interest in responding to surveys, growing distrust of government, and escalating privacy concerns. Moreover, for communities at risk for undercounting, mobilization of trusted voices is the key to engagement. That requires a much longer time frame and more resources than the Bureau provided for 2020.

During the decade between each census, without consistent outreach and relationship building, institutional memory about the census and past engagement is lost in the government, corporate, philanthropic and community sectors. It would be more cost effective in the long run for the Census Bureau to maintain a robust partnership program throughout the decade, not only for the decennial census but also to help support its many other surveys, including the American Community Survey.

Moreover, only some states and local governments had the foresight and resources to supplement the outreach by the Census Bureau. Many were late in setting up complete count committees and many committees did not have sufficient support to build strong outreach efforts. Philanthropy sought to fill some of the gaps. One of the most significant recommendations concerns the need for the federal government to provide funding for state and local efforts.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Administration should propose, and Congress should fund, a grant program within the Department of Commerce to provide an appropriate level of support for census outreach by Tribal, state, and local governments, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The Census Bureau should:

- strengthen and maintain its Partnership Programs throughout the decade, employing a sufficient number of permanent national and regional partnership specialists who work in concert with regional data dissemination specialists, and begin its hiring of temporary regional, local, and tribal partnership specialists three to four years in advance of Census Day.

- engage funders and other philanthropic institutions early in 2030 Census planning, as well as in other data collection programs, in order to leverage philanthropic resources in a timely and effective way;
- engage national and local community-based organizations early in 2030 Census planning, as well as in strengthening the American Community Survey;
- retool the corporate partnership program to ensure that companies of all sizes understand the role the census plays in matters relevant to their businesses and the communities they serve;
- increase its national and regional partnerships with educational institutions and professional educational associations, with an emphasis on the Bureau of Indian Education, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving institutions;
- maintain and build on its partnerships with organizations and experts focused on child and family issues and establish more robust, comprehensive and consistent outreach to rural areas;
- expand outreach to other federal agencies to better leverage opportunities that will ensure broader public awareness of the importance of the census;
- increase resources for the Statistics in the Schools program and for outreach to the education community throughout the decade, with new investment in materials relevant to Tribal, Native, and indigenous populations;
- increase staffing and funding for Census Open Innovation Labs (COIL) to help modernize its approaches to developing and supporting partnership engagement and the use of technology and better integrate it into the regional and national programs.



COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

The Census Bureau worked hard to incorporate some of the lessons learned from the 2010 census, for example integrating the partnership work with the communications plan. The integration led to the extremely helpful introduction of increased content creation for use by groups and government agencies in the Bureau's partnership program. The Bureau also increased the number of languages it used for paid advertising and, as a result, also increased its messaging research in languages other than English. It also had to adapt its plan to the changing media landscape. Digital media was in its infancy in 2010, so the Bureau needed to develop a strategy for 2020 while taking into account the persistent digital divide facing many historically undercounted communities as well as the threat of misinformation and disinformation. Ethnic media, like other traditional media, was already struggling economically before the pandemic resulting in further loss of advertising opportunities and businesses shutting down. Ethnic media was also more unlikely to be able to meet federal government contracting requirements.

Some problems persisted because the Bureau continued to approach the paid advertising directed to communities at greater risk of being missed as if they comprised a small minority of the population. In fact, these populations collectively represent a significant portion of the census universe. People of color, one of the communities historically undercounted, are a majority of the population in several states and counties. The Census Bureau needs to overcome the higher levels of distrust and lack of knowledge of the census in many of these communities using targeted messages and trusted media that are more likely to reach and be persuasive to these audiences. The advertising budget and approach need to better reflect this reality. While the advertising content for the mass advertising and the Asian American audiences improved from 2010, serious issues persisted with the Native American content. These communities were among the most undercounted population in 2010. In addition, while the Bureau increased the number of languages, this was insufficient to ensure it could achieve its mission of

CENSUS NEWSLETTER/BOLETÍN
Celebrar tu presencia - Celebrate your Presence!

Si aún no has respondido al Censo podrás recibir una visita a tu casa de un representante del Censo a partir del 12 de SEPTIEMBRE.
¡Llena el CENSO con toda seguridad en tu casa! LA VISITA!
SKIP THE LINE If you haven't filled out the Census yet you may get a visit to your home from a Census enumerator starting SEPT. 12th.
VISIT! Fill out the CENSUS safely in your home!

66.5% PIMA COUNTY RESPONSE RATE
 TASA DE RESPUESTA DEL CONDADO PIMA

85% or more	75 to 84%	65 to 74%	55 to 64%	45 to 54%	35 to 44%	25 to 34%	15 to 24%	No data
85% or more	75 to 84%	65 to 74%	55 to 64%	45 to 54%	35 to 44%	25 to 34%	15 to 24%	No data

3 maneras fáciles de responder:
 3 easy ways to respond:

- Internet**
my2020census.gov
- Teléfono/Phone**
844-468-2020 (esp.)
844-330-2020 (eng.)
- Correo/Mail**

EVENTOS/EVENTS:
 Sept. 24, 2020 (sunday/Thursday) **Census Counts National Test Run** - Join us for one last push to get out the count! We'll be testing Arizona and other low-count states like TX, MS and LA.
 5:55PM @ Register here: <http://bit.ly/countdown4census>
 Sept. 25, 2020 (monday/Friday) **CENSO FIESTA** - Join us to complete your Census and get some rewards & prizes! *Acompáñanos para completar tu Censo y recibir recompensas & premios!*
 4:30PM @ 99 Cent Bargain Warehouse, 5670 S. Nogales Hwy, Tucson, AZ 85706
 Sept. 25, 2020 (monday/Friday) **CENSOTON** - Join One Arizona on all-day FB live event where we'll be raffling off prizes. *Acompáñanos en un evento de FB live donde estaremos haciendo rifas.*
 10AM-10PM @ <https://www.facebook.com/OneArizona>
 If you have any more events, please reach out to Esham@cenussouthaz.org (520-477-2278) so we can share them with the rest of the AZ Census Coalition.

counting everyone. Translation and production costs are a relevant factor but so is the cost of households not self-responding. The Bureau estimated that every one percent of households that do not self-respond costs about \$44 million in follow-up costs. In addition, self-response generates more complete and accurate data.

The Bureau did not purchase ads in American Indian, Alaska Native or Pacific Islander languages even though one in four American Indians and Alaska Natives speak a language other than English at home. While Native Americans are a small percentage of the national population, indigenous speakers tend to be geographically concentrated. For example, Alaska Natives are almost 16% of the state's population and Alaska tends to have one of the highest undercounts. Similarly, the Bureau did not purchase ads in Hindi or Urdu even though hundreds of thousands of South Asians are limited English proficient or prefer to speak these languages in their homes. This group saw significant population growth primarily through immigration over the past decade. These ethnic groups also tend to be geographically concentrated. Because of the way the Bureau approached its paid advertising, it failed to place English advertising in South Asian media and did not target South Asian shopping centers with out of home advertising. State and local governments and philanthropy sought to fill in gaps, but the Bureau would not share timely, adequate information about its advertising plans to enable these partners to plan and sufficiently fill the holes.

Arab American and Native American stakeholders were unhappy with the content and placement of the advertising that was created for their communities. Black stakeholders and other census partners felt that advertising on hyper-local media, including radio, was more effective than national television.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- increase the share of the advertising budget targeting historically undercounted population groups, and expand messaging research and paid advertising programs to better target population groups at higher risk of being missed in the census, adding parents of young children, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ households;
- set self-response goals for contractors for each targeted historically undercounted population, rather than establishing one collective goal, to reduce any bias against investing in more expensive outreach to these target populations;
- consider a different bidding process and relationship between the prime agency and the contractors focused on target populations most at risk of being undercounted so that the Bureau could gain better access to the most expert firms and reduce inherent financial conflicts of interest that distort the Bureau's ability to more successfully move these target populations;
- include ethnic market targeting in the paid advertising budget, regardless of whether the audiences are supported by the language assistance program and invest in Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic media that include English language media specifically targeting ethnic communities;
- expand the number of covered languages and budget campaigns targeting communities at higher risk of being undercounted based on the cost of effectively reaching them, not on their population size;
- collaborate more closely with Tribal Nations and organizations to create culturally relevant advertising messages, with a context that reflects local languages and dialects;
- work with philanthropy and relevant stakeholders to collectively identify media trusted in the communities at risk of being undercounted and assist them in either overcoming the current barriers to qualifying for government paid ads or obtaining other funding to run ads;
- increase investment in hyper-targeted local market advertising and in non-TV/digital platforms;
- continue coordinating with stakeholders and social media companies to combat misinformation and disinformation about the census and other surveys.



PEAK CENSUS OPERATIONS

The Bureau refers to the period when the census data collection begins in remote Alaska in late January to the end of the Nonresponse Follow-up phase as “Peak Census Operations.” The first large operation is self-response, when households are asked to submit their completed questionnaires on-line, by phone, or by mail. In 2020, households could respond without using the unique ID number assigned to each address (called a non-ID response). In addition, households could respond on-line with the help of Bureau Staff providing Mobile Questionnaire Assistance.

SELF RESPONSE

The Bureau is to be commended for keeping the on-line portal operating without any interruption. Clearly, it is a popular response option and it became even more critical once the pandemic disrupted the Bureau’s operations. One priority area for improvement is making it easier to respond without using the unique ID number which appears on the invitation assigned to and delivered to each address.

The telephone response option, known as Census Questionnaire Assistance (CQA), is important for those who do not have access to broadband or computers, are illiterate or limited English proficient, or who are more comfortable providing information by phone. The Bureau should not misinterpret the relatively low telephone response rate as signaling a preference for the on-line or paper response options. There are several likely reasons why the telephone option was underused and the Bureau should address these in future plans. The problems included: ambiguous language in the letter; limited advertising only in print; reluctance of low-income respondents to use limited phone plan minutes; long wait times; and an unclear recorded opening message that sought to push people on-line; and an opening message that continued for 40 seconds before the caller heard a menu for further assistance, all the while continuing to direct callers to the on-line response portal and instructing callers to locate the household ID on their census packet. Consequently, many callers hung up because they didn’t think they could give their responses by phone or without their unique household ID. In addition, there was at least a week early in the process when new pandemic protocols required the Bureau to reorganize its call centers which overwhelmed the lines, particularly in languages other than English. Local partners lost faith in the telephone option and stopped directing their communities to use it.

Research suggests that a significant number of households prefer to respond using the paper form, especially in historically undercounted communities. About 20 percent of addresses nationwide received an English or bilingual English-Spanish paper form in their first mailing. Census field staff hand-delivered census packets that included the paper form to most households without city-style mailing addresses. However, it is unrealistic to expect that households failing to respond quickly after receiving their census packets will have saved the materials. While paper forms are more costly overall than on-line responses, they are still a cost-effective investment if more households self-respond using this method, compared to the cost of sending an enumerator to each door.

For the 2020 Census, as a result of stakeholder advocacy, Congress required the Census Bureau to establish a questionnaire assistance program. The Bureau developed a plan for mobile assistance, with deployment based on neighborhoods or areas with low self-response rates. However, the pandemic upended some of that planning. Where MQA was deployed effectively, it was viewed as extremely helpful. However, MQA staffing in 2020 was somewhat problematic, relying on reassigned recruitment assistants rather than more knowledgeable partnership specialists.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- research the extent and reasons for noncompletion of on-line responses and improve the user interface;
- analyze non-ID response rates and reconfigure operations and the on-line portal to accommodate non-ID responses more easily;
- advertise the telephone option on radio and television to reach people who have low literacy, and elevate the telephone response option in census invitation packets;
- advise callers upfront in the telephone response opening message that they can give their responses by phone, with or without an ID number;
- ensure sufficient telephone staffing capacity and minimal wait times, and more fully advertise the availability of the telephone response option;
- urge cellular service companies to provide free minutes covering calls made to the census telephone response lines;
- continue to make paper forms available in 2030 and consider increasing the number of paper forms sent to each nonresponding household;
- make paper forms available at selected community locations (similar to previous “Be Counted” operations), and test a system, with sufficient safeguards, of allowing respondents to download an official form from the internet.
- expand and strengthen the Mobile Questionnaire Assistance concept, placing Census Bureau staff at community and government centers to provide direct assistance to people willing to self-respond.



RURAL AREAS

The Bureau's 2020 Census Operational Plan did not sufficiently address the range of challenges unique to rural and indigenous areas (including Pacific Islander communities in Hawaii) and broadband deserts, jeopardizing a fair and accurate count of these communities and populations. With half the number of Area Census Offices compared to the 2010 Census, there often were not enough official Census 2020 staff at local events in some states and there was an inadequate supply of relevant and effective census materials for rural events.

Rural areas without city-style addresses or mail delivery to housing units are covered by the Update/Leave Operation, when census workers *update* the Bureau's address list and *leave* a census packet with a paper form at each housing unit. (The Bureau has a general policy of not mailing census packets to P.O. Boxes.) Shortly after the start of peak census operations in March 2020, the pandemic interrupted and seriously delayed completion of the Update/Leave operation. The wildfires, pandemic, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters that occurred before and during Census 2020 further exposed vulnerabilities in how the Bureau counts rural areas.

Equally important, the Census Bureau must overcome substantial distrust of the federal government among American Indians, which, in previous censuses, contributed to high undercount rates of Native Americans living on reservations. For 2020, the Bureau did not hire enough enumerators living on reservations nor did it negotiate agreements covering the sharing of Tribal government records that could have improved coverage of this population.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- consult with rural community leaders and Tribal governments as it assesses and redesigns its approach to counting and conducting surveys that include rural areas;
- reverse its blanket policy of not mailing census packets to P.O. Boxes, particularly in rural areas, and research alternative ways to send census materials to households lacking city-style mailing addresses, especially those located on American Indian reservations and Tribal lands, and in Alaska Native villages;
- ensure sufficient local hiring of field staff and enumerators who are familiar with the areas to which they are assigned;
- examine the degree to which the reduced number of local census offices impacted its ability to provide quality support to rural and remote areas and Tribal lands, and to establish a visible presence to residents of these communities through local media.
- develop a joint comprehensive census plan with each Tribe for the 2030 Census early in the decade, including appropriate additional protections around any agreement to share Tribal administrative records programs and that ensures adequate hiring of census workers in these areas with appropriate language and cultural knowledge.

CENSUS WORKERS AND NONRESPONSE FOLLOW-UP

The Nonresponse Follow-Up Operation (NRFU) includes a series of methods to collect information from or resolve the status of housing units from which a self-response is not received. It is a massive operation involving the hiring and deployment of about 500,000 temporary, largely part-time, census takers, known as enumerators, who visit nonresponding households to collect census responses.

The Bureau is to be applauded for its efforts to complete hiring, training, and deployment of hundreds of thousands of census workers under incredible pressures and challenging circumstances. At the height of the enumeration, the Bureau's workforce is one of the nation's largest government operations, second only to the military. In 2019 and early 2020, before the pandemic, unemployment was relatively low, raising concerns about the Bureau's ability to recruit enough workers. Once the pandemic upended community life and the economy, the Bureau had to shift almost completely to virtual training and shorten in-person onboarding procedures. This created some significant gaps. In addition, the Bureau had to resume recruitment efforts while the census was ongoing because approximately a third of its recruited workforce dropped out due to COVID fears.

The Bureau's decision to move the entire application process on-line made it difficult for residents in areas with low internet connectivity and computer access to pursue census jobs, a problem exacerbated by limited fingerprinting options. This resulted in the insufficient hiring of census workers in many areas, particularly in rural regions and low-income communities, forcing the Bureau to assign enumerators to communities and even states in which they did not live. The pandemic, natural disasters, and the Administration's decision to end the Nonresponse Follow-up operation early compounded the difficulties of completing an operation that was being carried out months later than planned.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- consider issuing one or more articles of apparel to enumerators, to help the public identify official staff;
- provide owners, managers, and landlords of apartment buildings, other multi-family housing, and gated communities with clear and frequent information about their legal obligation to guarantee entry for enumerators seeking to visit households on their properties; and prepare managers and landlords as proxies to provide information about the occupants of housing units;
- ensure that advertising during NRFU alerts households (even those who self-respond) to the possibility of repeat visits and requests for proxy interviews;
- make paper job applications available in areas without reliable broadband access or with low computer usage, **and** accommodate alternative documentation of fingerprinting, particularly in areas where fingerprinting services are not easily accessible or widely available;
- evaluate how well-matched bilingual staff were to the communities in which they worked in 2020, and track, by language, the hiring of bilingual workers as partnership specialists, enumerators, and mobile assistance staff for the 2030 Census;
- establish an earlier and clearer formal process to ensure that states adopt waivers allowing recipients of certain government benefits to work as enumerators without losing or jeopardizing their eligibility for benefits;
- conduct an extensive assessment of training materials and protocols, the extent to which field staff correctly followed procedures, and the availability of ongoing, real-time support for field staff.

SPECIAL ENUMERATION OPERATIONS

There are several operations designed to enumerate special populations, such as people living in group settings (known as Group Quarters) or transitory housing. Group Quarters include college dormitories, juvenile and immigrant detention centers, skilled nursing homes, and prisons. The Group Quarters Operation included the Service-based Enumeration (SBE) and Targeted Non-Sheltered Outdoor Location (TNSOL) Operations, designed to count persons experiencing homelessness. The timing of the pandemic, which led to many lockdowns right around Census Day — April 1, 2020 — could not have been worse for these special operations. Many college students left their campus residences and returned home before they could be enumerated at their institution, causing significant confusion about where they should be counted. The Census Bureau sought to obtain from schools electronic administrative data about students living in college-run housing, but many institutions only provided minimal data about each student, citing federal privacy laws that Congress had failed to waive temporarily.

The count of people experiencing homelessness who live in sheltered facilities or outdoor locations is problematic and difficult even under the best of conditions. In 2020, those challenges were magnified, as the pandemic disrupted the timing of this operation (originally scheduled for March 30–April 1). Once the Bureau suspended field operations in the Spring of 2020, the Bureau wisely consulted with experts, service providers, and community advocates in rescheduling the SBE and TNSOL operations for September 22–24. Partner organizations heard subsequent reports that the operation was rushed, possibly due to the Administration’s effort to end Nonresponse Follow-up on September 30.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- research methodologies for measuring coverage of the Group Quarters population in the decennial census;
- work with Congress and relevant stakeholders to facilitate the use of administrative records to enumerate college students living in Group Quarters and to ensure that students living in off-campus housing are counted accurately;
- consult extensively with service providers, advocates, and state, local, and Tribal governments, about ways to improve the process for counting people experiencing homelessness, including the use of administrative records and databases that some localities maintain to help serve this vulnerable population;
- consult with experts and research how best to reach and accurately enumerate housing-insecure individuals and families who are not using the homeless shelter systems or living in unsheltered locations.

DATA VISUALIZATIONS AND GEOGRAPHIC DATA

The Census Bureau published several data visualizations related to 2020 self-response rates and related operational data, including easy access to related information such as the local concentration and patterns of contact strategies (English-only or bilingual, “Internet First,” or “Internet Choice” mailings) and Type of Enumeration Area (TEA) designations. The Census Bureau’s Response Outreach Area Mapper (ROAM) application showcased the Bureau’s Low Response Score metric. It represented the Bureau’s most prominent, public-facing web visualization platform to help stakeholder groups, journalists, elected officials, and others prepare for the 2020 Census self-response phase. The variety of visualization tools provided some benefits to stakeholders. But the range of tools caused confusion. The lack of interoperability across visualizations was limiting and the premier public-facing visualization – the ROAM map – suffered from several limitations that undermined its value.

In March 2020, as the Bureau prepared to launch the self-response operation, it released the final self-response rates from the 2010 Census at all geographic levels, providing a comparable framework for what to expect in 2020. Starting in late March and continuing throughout the extended 2020 data collection period, stakeholders could download real-time 2020 self-response rates at all geographic levels. Stakeholder organizations used this information to understand how well their communities were responding to the 2020 Census and to analyze these rates in relation to local demographic characteristics. This information enabled stakeholders to shift resources and efforts to areas with lower response rates. The Bureau later posted completion rates from the Nonresponse Follow-up Operation at the Area Census Office level — information that could have been more useful to guide resource allocation and targeting if it had been available at lower geographic levels. While accessing the data was easy and direct, the Census Bureau introduced limitations that created confusion, including lack of comparability between the 2010 and 2020 Census metrics for tracking self-response in real-time, and unclear geographic units for publishing 2020 Census rates.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- consult with stakeholders about the range and presentation of data most useful for deploying effective outreach campaigns to boost response rates and cooperation with enumerators;
- consider visualization platforms to be as important as public relations and advertising campaigns and invest sufficiently in developing best-in-class visualization platforms, to maximize their usefulness in informing the work of journalists, policymakers, funders and other stakeholders;
- report NRFU completion rates at lower levels of geography to inform partner outreach and philanthropic resource investment strategies effectively during field data collection.

G

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Census Bureau should:

- expand its research into the underlying factors that contribute to the disproportionate undercount of people of color, renters, and young children, and the overcount of the non-Hispanic White population. The research should inform new design elements for the 2030 Census that can address the reasons for the persistent differential coverage;
- consult with organizations and other experts working with people with disabilities to develop a research agenda aimed at improving the enumeration of this often overlooked population, and investigate barriers to participation that might affect the accuracy of the count of this often-overlooked population;
- research and develop strategies that more specifically target the most highly undercounted segments by age and race within racial and ethnic groups at risk for significant undercounting;
- continue research on the use of administrative records, when appropriate, to supplement direct enumeration and develop a robust plan to improve the quality and usability of those records for all population groups and types of households;
- explore ways to better incorporate and deploy cutting-edge technology throughout its operations for the 2030 Census and the American Community Survey;
- develop and maintain a comprehensive resource cataloguing the use of census-derived data for the geographic allocation of federal assistance;
- invest in research assessing the use of census data by state government agencies in their allocation of state and federal expenditures;
- revise the way it presents and explains measurements of census accuracy to elevate components of error, including omissions and duplications, as equally consequential to net under- and overcount.



CENSUS 2020 OPERATIONS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE DEDICATED CAREER CENSUS BUREAU EMPLOYEES AND STAKEHOLDER communities worked tirelessly in the face of unprecedented challenges to complete the 2020 Census. This report seeks to identify lessons from 2020 that Congress, the Administration, and the Census Bureau can use in planning for 2030 and other ongoing surveys.

The primary mission of the census can be found in Article I, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution, as amended by the Fourteenth Amendment. Fundamental to our representative democracy is a fair and accurate count to use for apportionment and redistricting to account for population shifts among and within states. Added to this mission is the fact that trillions of federal dollars and other government funding are allocated each decade according to formulas or based on indicators drawn from the census, and that the enforcement of civil rights laws such as the Voting Rights Act depends on these data. Consequently, it matters very much that all households and group facility residents are counted accurately and in the right neighborhood.

The Census Bureau (the “Bureau”) has an immense challenge every decade to count a country with a massive diverse population living in vastly different geographies with wide disparities in access to technology, information, and housing. Distrust of government and concerns about privacy persist and are growing in communities that are at greatest risk of being undercounted. It is a country where an increasing number of languages are spoken; where so-called nontraditional households are becoming the norm; where climate change and public health crises are introducing new levels of environmental uncertainty and impediments; and where seemingly every governance issue has become highly partisan and politicized, even the constitutionally mandated decennial census.

The Census Bureau has a long-standing reputation for its relative lack of transparency. As an agency rooted in data science and strict legal requirements of confidentiality, this is not entirely surprising. The mounting challenges facing the census process have pushed the Bureau over the past three decades to see the value in more robustly engaging stakeholders as partners in the census. Successful partnerships require greater transparency. The global pandemic forced dramatic shifts in 2020 Census operations and further highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders. The politicization of the census by the previous Administration added to the challenges: first, trying to add an untested citizenship question at the eleventh hour; second, issuing orders to exclude undocumented immigrants from the apportionment calculations and to build a database of U.S. residents by citizenship and immigration status that states could use to redistrict with count of citizens only; and third, by abruptly seeking to rush completion of the count and data processing, both of which had been extended because of the pandemic. These problems laid bare several operational difficulties and pushed the Bureau to experiment in real time to accomplish its mission.

CENSUS CONTENT AND RULES

QUESTIONNAIRE CONTENT

IN PREPARATION FOR THE 2020 CENSUS, THE BUREAU RESEARCHED AND TESTED

several revisions to the questionnaire, most notably a combined race and Hispanic origin question and the addition of a new origin category, Middle Eastern and North African (MENA). The Bureau's expert staff recommended these changes to the Census Director, but they were stymied by the failure of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to complete a simultaneous process of updating the official federal standards for the collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data. OMB had relied on the Census Bureau's multi-year, iterative testing process to support its own proposal for revising the formal standards and was prepared to finalize the new policy by late 2016. However, when the new Administration took office in 2017, that process came to a halt, with no explanation.

Given the strong support from the vast majority of stakeholders who filed formal comments, and the Census Bureau's own robust testing and qualitative research justifying the proposed revisions, the Census Bureau should pursue similar modifications and explore whether additional changes are warranted for the 2030 Census.

Throughout the history of the census, despite occasional controversy over wording and even their inclusion, the race and ethnicity questions and the purposes for the data they produce have continued to evolve. Recently, some observers have suggested reconsidering inclusion of these questions altogether on the decennial census. However, block-level race and ethnicity data, which can only be derived from the census, are essential to ensure compliance with provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended, related to redistricting, one of the main purposes of the census. The data are also important to the enforcement of other civil rights laws. In addition, there is a history of undercounting some racial and ethnic populations while overcounting others. Therefore, the race and ethnicity questions are important to understanding where investments need to be made to ensure a fair and accurate count. Other vital uses of block-level data include ensuring representative samples for both public and private research critical to shaping public policy, and effectively targeting government, nonprofit and private services, as well as government and philanthropic investments.

The Bureau had explored the addition of LGBTQ+ questions after receiving information from various federal agencies as to the need for such information for their programs. They tested and added a relationship question to the 2020 questionnaire and apparently were prepared to recommend the addition of questions to the ACS but did not follow through after the change in Administrations in 2017. Research from the Williams Institute released in June 2021 found that there are about 1.2 million nonbinary LGBTQ+ adults in the U.S.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Bureau should use a combined race and Hispanic origin question for the 2030 Census and the ACS, once the Office of Management and Budget has revised the federal standards for collecting and publishing data on race and ethnicity to allow a one-question format.
- The Bureau should offer a new Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) category in a combined race and ethnicity question.
- The U.S. Office of Management Budget should quickly resume the process it started last decade to revise the federal Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, to allow the Census Bureau to propose and adopt these changes.

The Bureau should use a combined race and Hispanic origin question for the 2030 Census and the ACS.

- The Bureau should not eliminate the race and ethnicity questions from the decennial census. The Bureau should consider testing a longer drop-down menu in the on-line version of the questionnaire for “other” national origin groups.
- The Bureau should recommend additional questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the American Community Survey and for Census 2030.
- The Bureau should research a potential expansion of options to the sex question, which currently provides only two traditional options.

Currently, the American Community Survey (ACS) — the ongoing part of the census that replaced the previous census “long form” in 2005 — collects useful data on citizenship, which are available at the census tract and, in many areas, at the block group levels. These data have proven to be sufficient for implementing and enforcing provisions of the Voting Rights Act, and there are no requirements for block-level data on citizenship or immigration status in federal law, which is the standard for including questions both in the census and the ACS. The Census Bureau has an obligation to keep the public burden of answering surveys as low as possible. It accomplishes this goal through a policy adopted by the Office of Management and Budget and the Bureau itself, at the urging of members of Congress on a bipartisan basis following the 1990 Census. That policy states that the census and ACS may only collect data that meet one of three standards: (1) a federal statute mandates the collection of the data in the census; (2) a federal statute requires the data to implement or administer a federal policy or program, and the census or ACS are the only reliable sources of the data; or (3) a federal court opinion requires the data to carry out a court order or judicial decision. Through a years-long process of working with federal agencies each decade to determine and (importantly) document their data needs, this policy helps the Census Bureau as much as possible reduce the response burden of the census and ACS, for which response is mandatory by law.

Furthermore, since 1950, the Census Bureau has not included questions on citizenship or immigration status in the census which reaches every household in the country. This is because of long-standing concerns that such questions would depress participation and trust in the census, not only among undocumented immigrants, but among legal immigrants who might be confused as to why the Census Bureau is asking for this information, or who might live with family members or friends whose immigration status is in question (i.e. mixed immigration status households).

In advance of the 2020 Census, efforts by the previous administration to add a citizenship question to the form, while ultimately unsuccessful, created significant fear in immigrant communities and added to the distrust of the census in other historically undercounted communities. Because of the lengthy public controversy over the citizenship question, service organizations and advocates working to promote census response in these communities encountered lingering confusion about whether the census would ask about citizenship, as well as skepticism about assurances that census data would be kept confidential. Philanthropy and its partners found that the political controversy increased the hesitancy of some faith leaders, business leaders, community service agencies, teachers, health care providers, and other trusted voices to promote census participation. At a briefing of well-known actors and other popular culture influencers long after litigation challenging inclusion of a citizenship question was settled, some participants confessed that they had not wanted to be involved because they thought the citizenship question was still on the form. Research conducted during the course of the litigation documented the significant adverse impact on census response of adding such a question. Therefore, the Census Bureau should continue collecting data on citizenship only in the ACS; it is not necessary to test the possibility of adding questions on citizenship or immigration status to the decennial census.

The Bureau should offer a new Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) category in a combined race and ethnicity question.

The Bureau should not add, or consider adding, questions on citizenship or immigration status to the decennial census in the future.

- The Bureau should not add, or consider adding, questions on citizenship or immigration status to the decennial census in the future.

RESIDENCE CRITERIA

Extensive research by the Prison Policy Initiative over the last decade demonstrates how significantly representation has shifted from urban areas to more suburban and rural areas under the current rule. [Prison Gerrymandering / Prison Policy Initiative](#) Census numbers have an impact on funding and representation for 10 years, and most incarcerated persons will be returning home to their communities during those 10 years.

As part of planning for the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau considered revising the residence criteria to change the way incarcerated persons are counted. When the Bureau published the proposed Residence Criteria for 2020 in the *Federal Register*, seeking comments on the wide range of rules governing where people are counted and who is counted, it received approximately 100,000 comments in support of counting incarcerated persons at their pre-incarceration address. Supporters included two former Census Bureau Directors, formerly incarcerated individuals, civil rights and voting rights organizations, elected officials, and 35 philanthropic organizations. Despite this widespread support for a revised residence criteria governing incarcerated persons, the change was not made by the new administration that took office in 2017. Of note, the Census Bureau did revise its residence criteria to allow boarding school students to be counted in their home jurisdictions; but did not allow detained juveniles to be counted at their pre-incarceration home addresses.

A growing number of states are adopting redistricting laws to require incarcerated individuals to be counted where they lived prior to incarceration. As a result, the Bureau implemented procedures for the 2020 Census to enable states and other jurisdictions that choose to reallocate incarcerated individuals, including detained juveniles, to their home communities for purposes of redistricting, to comply with state and local laws. However, the Bureau's approach has not worked well for states like California that have statutory requirements including a reallocation provision that runs into apparent conflict with the federal statutory requirements protecting census data confidentiality.

- The Bureau should revise the Residence Criteria and Situations for the 2030 Census to enumerate incarcerated persons, including detained juveniles, at their last home address prior to incarceration. While the Bureau explores a change to its Residence Criteria for incarcerated persons, it should work with states that have changed their redistricting residence rules, along with state and local government associations and other interested stakeholders, on improving a methodology to count incarcerated individuals, including detained juveniles, in their home communities, rather than at the facilities in which they are incarcerated on Census Day.
- The Bureau should research the various forms of nonstandard housing and gain an understanding of where such housing is likely to flourish in diverse regions of the country. It should develop best practices to help address listers, as well as state and local governments participating in Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA), identify such housing and add or submit addresses to improve the Master Address File. Some California stakeholders observed that the Bureau's guide for address listers largely reflected east coast housing environments and did not sufficiently cover diverse local situations and nonstandard housing in other regions of the country.

The Bureau should revise the Residence Criteria and Situations for the 2030 Census to enumerate incarcerated persons, including detained juveniles, at their last home address prior to incarceration.

CENSUS PREPARATIONS

FIELD TESTING OF OPERATIONS

IN THE PAST, THE BUREAU HAS SOUGHT TO CONDUCT RIGOROUS FIELD TESTS PRIOR TO a decennial count that are designed to assess different aspects of its planned operations. Insufficient and late funding derailed the Bureau's testing plans for 2020 which hindered the Bureau's ability to optimize its operations, especially for historically undercounted populations. The lack of sufficient testing in diverse sites was particularly problematic given the new addition of on-line and telephone response systems and the reality of the digital divide and lack of even telephone access in some rural areas. The lack of testing also hampered the ability of foundations and community partners to understand what the gaps might be and how best to work with the Bureau's planned operations and Congressional Committees to provide appropriate oversight.

Historically, the Bureau has conducted a dress rehearsal two years before the census in more than one type of geographic area. Renamed the End-to-End Census Test for the 2020 Census, this rehearsal includes the self-response and Nonresponse follow-up operations, as well as outreach messages and materials. For 2018, the Bureau had planned End-to-End Census Test sites in Providence County, Rhode Island; Pierce County, Washington, which would have included the city of Tacoma, a military base, an Indian reservation and Tribal lands; and, to capture a more rural area, the Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill region of West Virginia. Facing budget uncertainties caused by a Congressional delay in appropriations, the Bureau canceled the dress rehearsal sites in Washington State and rural West Virginia. At the remaining site, due to delays in its message testing, the Bureau dropped plans to include a communications campaign. Insufficient funding for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test also led to elimination of a post-enumeration survey, as well as a delayed Group Quarters Operation. The Bureau also canceled all field tests planned for 2017, which included Puerto Rico and several Indian reservations and surrounding rural areas.

In a census that included a full on-line response option and hired only on-line, the lack of testing in a rural area and on Indian reservations meant that the Bureau could not identify and address operational challenges unique to these settings. For example, the Bureau was relying, in part, on the ability of households to access broadband at local libraries. However, in rural areas that lack public transportation, any distance beyond a mile is a significant barrier, particularly for low-income households and senior citizens. Enumerators in rural areas also reported difficulties with the apps for address updating and Nonresponse Follow-up. The Idaho State Complete Count Committee reported in its November 2020 evaluation memo that the enumerator app downloaded and rebooted at awkward times. The app also understated distances, in one case dispatching enumerators 485 miles within Idaho for just two cases. Enumerators ended up using their personal phone GIS to more accurately locate households for Nonresponse Follow-up.

The pandemic exacerbated the challenges of counting in rural areas and on Tribal lands, so the lack of testing in these locations proved particularly problematic. Problems with the advertising campaign targeting Native Americans might also have been caught earlier if the communications plan had been adequately tested.

- Congress should ensure that the Bureau has timely and sufficient funding to conduct comprehensive testing of its planned operations, advertising campaign, and outreach activities, including a dress rehearsal in multiple, diverse sites, as well as additional tests in Puerto Rico, on American Indian reservations and Tribal lands, and in rural areas.



LOCAL UPDATE OF CENSUS ADDRESSES (LUCA) AND CANVASSING OPERATIONS

Census materials are mailed to households, and the Census Bureau must enumerate people in a precise location (including those who live in group facilities), so it is critical that the Bureau have a complete Master Address File (MAF) with current, accurate addresses. LUCA operations began in January 2017 with letters to Tribal Chairs, Governors, and the highest elected or appointed officials in local governments, informing them of the opportunity to review and update the Census Bureau's address file for their respective jurisdictions. The operation relies heavily on information from local government housing and building records, which often do not have accurate data on nonstandard housing. Six states did not elect to participate in LUCA, so it was important that other levels of government were eligible to participate without the state. Conversely, for localities without the resources or technical expertise to participate in LUCA on their own, state review on behalf of counties, cities, and towns also helped ensure more comprehensive coverage.

Participating in LUCA is completely voluntary on the part of state and local governments. The federal government does not provide funding to Tribal, state, county, city, or other local governments to cover the cost of reviewing and updating address information, which can be expensive to do well. California, for example, invested \$7 million to help its counties participate in LUCA for the 2020 Census. The Bureau briefed government officials at association conferences (e.g. National Conference of State Legislatures, National League of Cities) and offered trainings, but there was little outreach to nongovernmental census stakeholders. Generally, there is a low level of awareness about the importance of participating in this once-a-decade program. Including a wider array of census stakeholders in LUCA outreach efforts can help stakeholders to encourage governmental participation and support the investment of local funds in the program. A core team of permanent partnership specialists at the national and regional levels, coupled with earlier ramp-up of the decennial partnership specialist hiring, could facilitate an effective outreach and education effort.

Currently, the federal government is shifting the costs of this aspect of the census to state, local and Tribal governments. This program structure disadvantages states, counties, and municipalities with a more limited tax base, as they might not have the resources to ensuring that housing units and group living facilities are accurately listed and ultimately counted. The availability of some funding could also help raise the visibility and underscore the importance of this operation and help jumpstart census planning.



In 2020, the affordable housing crisis in many regions of the country, both rural and urban, expanded the number of people living in homes that may not be in the records of government agencies and may not be visible without in-person examination. Single housing units may be subdivided into apartments. Garages, pool houses, and sheds may be converted into living quarters without permits. Parked trailers in the back of homes may serve as housing. People may be living in commercial buildings, including in or above restaurants and stores. This unconventional, often-hidden housing may be one cause of the disproportionate net undercount of renters — generally an indicator of lower-income households — who often are young adults, rural non-Hispanic White residents, people of color, and immigrants.

In a paper entitled, “Community-based Canvassing to Improve the U.S. Census Bureau’s Master Address File: California’s experience in LUCA 2018,” Ed Kissam and Jo Ann Intili of the WKF Giving Fund, and Cindy Quezada of the Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative, estimated that up to half of the undercount in the area studied may occur because these homes do not receive a census packet (mailed or hand-delivered) or a follow-up visit from an enumerator. In other words, the Bureau does not know that it has failed to count housing units that are not in the MAF. The study examined a 2018 project involving seven California counties, one of which was rural, using technology and training developed by Community Connect Labs and employing volunteers, to identify nonstandard housing not found in official government administrative records. Because of concerns that information about unpermitted or illegal occupancy would be shared with housing enforcement agencies, this work requires carefully-considered, secure technology to protect both occupants and owners. The project identified housing that likely would not have been found through the Census Bureau’s in-office canvassing procedures alone. The knowledge of local volunteers played a critical role. Community volunteers canvassed areas with about one million housing units and identified about 13,000 new housing units for local governments participating in LUCA to submit. Some California stakeholders observed that the Bureau’s guide for address listers largely reflected east coast housing environments and did not sufficiently cover diverse local situations and nonstandard housing in other regions of the country.

A comprehensive address list will help propel a more accurate enumeration and help ensure that these communities receive the political representation — through apportionment and redistricting — and government resources they deserve. As we saw from the 2020 Census apportionment results, small numbers of people can make the difference between a state gaining, losing, or maintaining representation in Congress. A similar dynamic applies to apportionment of state legislative seats. This research highlights the necessity of in-field canvassing to identify hidden and low-visibility housing. Yet, the Bureau significantly reduced the portion of addresses subject to in-field verification in the Address Canvassing Operation from 100 percent in the 2010 Census to about 35 percent in the 2020, Census, replacing the remainder of the traditional pre-census address canvassing operation with “in-office” updating using satellite imagery, administrative data, and commercial databases.

- The Department of Commerce should propose, and Congress should fund, a program to help state, local and Tribal governments defray the cost of participating in the LUCA operation.
- The Bureau should educate and engage community-based stakeholder organizations in the LUCA operation more effectively. It should develop best practices to help address listers, as well as state and local governments participating in LUCA, identify such housing and add or submit addresses to improve the Master Address File. It also should provide states, counties, Tribal Nations, cities, and townships with toolkits that help them engage community partners in LUCA to improve the likelihood of identifying addresses that might otherwise be missed.
- The Bureau should research and address the proliferation of nonstandard housing in its MAF-verification activities and ensure inclusion of non-city style addresses in rural areas, particularly on Tribal lands; The Bureau should incorporate Tribally-

The Department of Commerce should propose, and Congress should fund, a program to help state, local and Tribal governments defray the cost of participating in the LUCA operation.

issued street addresses and 911 addresses that are commonly used on American Indian reservations and in Tribal areas.

- Given the rise in nonstandard housing that is not easily identified without in-person inspections, the Bureau should reconsider its decision to limit the In-Field Address Canvassing operation.
- The Bureau should consider contracting with national associations of relevant state and local government officials and jurisdictions, to ensure that government leaders and agencies have the necessary toolkits and information to fully participate in LUCA and in Get Out the Count efforts for the decennial census.

One of the most frequent complaints during the 2020 Nonresponse follow-up operation concerned multiple visits by enumerators to a household that had already responded. Some households found the frequent contact to be so oppressive and excessive that they answered the census multiple times in order to prevent future visits. While some repeat visits were attributable to quality-check procedures, it became apparent that in many cases, slight variations in an address for the same housing unit was a significant cause for multiple visits because the Bureau's system would continue to flag as nonresponsive any specific address from which a response had not been recorded. Sophisticated software should be able to identify these types of potential duplicate addresses and reduce or prevent multiple visits – especially if a household conveys that it has responded and if the visit is not a part of quality-check procedures. In addition, enumerators should be able to note the possibility of unnecessary repetitive visits for their supervisors to research and reconcile before assigning the same housing unit for additional visits.

The Bureau should develop more effective ways to reconcile different addresses for the same housing unit or living quarters in the Master Address File and remove all but the “correct” address, both before and during peak census operations.



LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

EVERY DECADE, THERE ARE CERTAIN COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE PERSISTENTLY BEEN undercounted, many of which are also covered by provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (as amended) related to redistricting. These population groups are not evenly dispersed among or within states. The diversity of the people being counted creates the need to translate materials and campaigns into languages other than English; hire culturally competent bilingual staff and contractors; develop a variety of messages to persuade people who have reason to be less trustful of government and are extremely concerned about the confidentiality of their information; and identify and invest in media and outreach activities that are most likely to reach and persuade a highly fragmented set of households.

The Bureau has historically resisted calls to provide forms and advertising in a sufficient number of languages, in part because of the added cost and work required. These costs have gone down because internet and phone response are now available, non-ID response is possible, and printing costs are lower. It should therefore be easier to address multilingual requirements. In addition, the Census Bureau has estimated that for each one percent of households that self-respond, it saves at least \$45 million in follow-up costs for households that do not self-respond. When the Bureau fails to adequately provide translated forms and in-language advertising and outreach materials, it sends a message to those households that their participation is not invited, valued, or necessary. It also shifts the cost of in-language assistance to state and local governments and community organizations that do not have the resources of the federal government. This places an unfair burden on communities with significant limited English-proficient Indigenous and immigrant populations, particularly since an accurate enumeration impacts their access to a fair share of government funding and a voice in their government.

LANGUAGES PROVIDED

For the 2010 census, the official printed forms were available in English and five additional languages (Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Russian). In 2020, however, paper questionnaires were available only in English and bilingual English-Spanish. 2020 telephone assistance and on-line forms were available in the designated “Official Languages” of Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. As in 2010, the Bureau also made available sample paper forms, written assistance and video guides in 59 languages. Sample forms were also available in Braille and Large Print, and videos were produced in American Sign Language. Unfortunately, these guides and sample forms were not well advertised to the general public because the Bureau’s paid advertising campaign only covered the Official Languages and only one the 59 languages (Navajo) was Native American, Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander.

The original advertising plan and translated partnership materials included only the Official Languages. To determine the Official Languages for 2020, the Bureau used a population threshold of 60,000 households and looked at national-level limited English proficiency population data without considering state and county population concentrations. To determine the 59 languages for the sample forms and video guides, the Bureau established a 2,000-household threshold and examined national, regional, and state level data on limited-English-speaking-households.



Identifying languages for paper forms, Internet Self-Response, and Census Questionnaire Assistance based only on national population metrics ignores the geographic concentration, often at the state or local level, of many language minorities. Even state-level metrics for determining languages for assistance guides, glossaries, and other tools to facilitate enumeration, fails to account for widespread concentration of language minority populations at the local level. An example of how important it is to account for state and local needs was the approach taken by the October 2016 Language Access Plan of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In accordance with Section 616 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), FEMA has identified priority languages in coordination with state and local governments based on the limited English proficient/accessible communication needs (LEP/ACN) of populations most commonly encountered in disasters. The languages most frequently encountered are Spanish, Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, Haitian Creole, French, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Russian, Tagalog, Urdu, Vietnamese, Greek, Polish, Thai, Portuguese, and American Sign Language.

Well over one million South Asians speak a language other than English at home, yet none of their languages were included as 2020 Official Languages. According to the 2015 American Community Survey report, 643,337 people speak Hindi at home and 132,631 were designated as limited English proficient, 397,502 Pakistani Americans speak Urdu at home with 116,566 designated as limited English proficient. The Hmong population is fairly concentrated in a handful of states and 44% of adult Hmong were found to be limited English proficient. Neither Hindi, Urdu nor Hmong are designated as Official Languages.

Analyses of 2020 Census self-response rates by the Center for Urban Research, City University of New York indicated there were Spanish speaking households with a clear preference for paper forms. (See, for example, “Week 1” analysis, which highlighted the early preference in “Internet Choice” tracts to respond by mail: <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-1>. Note the paragraph beginning, “Two findings are noteworthy...”; and “Week 7” analysis, which highlighted the increases in mail response after the Census Bureau sent reminder mailings: <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-7>. Note Section 1, “More Evidence of Response Rate Boosts...”). It is likely that some households in other limited-English-proficient communities are more comfortable using paper forms and less able to use on-line platforms.

For 2020, the Bureau developed the ability to accept responses on-line or by phone without a unique identifier. While non-ID response requires additional work to remove potential duplicate information and to put people and households in the correct location, printed forms in more languages would make it easier for more households from historically undercounted communities to self-respond. This would thereby reduce Nonresponse follow-up costs and offset additional costs associated with expanding in-language materials. Because of the pandemic, the Bureau implemented systems to expand the availability of bilingual operators, suggesting a capacity to offer telephone assistance in more languages. The continued advancement in technology should make it increasingly cost effective to offer more forms on-line in additional languages.

For 2020, the Bureau created a variety of very helpful outreach materials for use by community-based organizations and other institutions, some in the Official Languages. Given that over 300 languages are spoken in the United States, the Bureau should produce basic outreach materials in more than 14 languages. This



would increase the level of self-response and the accuracy of the data collected, while decreasing the expense of Nonresponse Follow-up, and shifting less of the expense to state and local government and community organizations.

In 2020, the pandemic almost eliminated in-person outreach by the Bureau, local governments, and stakeholder organizations. Accordingly, the Bureau shifted its standard approach of producing translated paid advertising only in the limited number of languages formally selected to be “Official Languages,” and added on-line advertising in a much greater number of languages. However, focusing on limited English proficiency rather than language spoken at home affords only the minimum amount of accommodation. Given the importance of the census and the potential of significant cost savings, it is in the country’s interest to eliminate language barriers to self-response. The following recommendations build upon this approach to balance the need for more extensive language assistance with reasonable cost and capacity considerations.

- The Bureau should vastly increase the number of languages it employs for official forms, telephone assistance, paid advertising, outreach materials, and staffing.
- The Bureau should determine language assistance priorities based on evaluation of the language needs of each county, rather than solely at the national level and should take into consideration languages spoken in the home as well as designated limited-English-speaking households to create a formula that would yield additional languages for paper questionnaires and telephone assistance. The Bureau should also develop an assistance program for small language populations with high rates of limited English proficiency, including recent arrivals through the U.S. refugee program.
- The Bureau should offer Census Questionnaire Assistance by telephone in more languages than provided in 2020. Languages offered should be chosen based on a formula that considers language assistance needs on a state and county level, not just a national level.
- The Bureau should offer the on-line response option in at least the 59 languages for which 2020 Census language guides were prepared, as well as in additional indigenous languages.
- The Bureau should expand the number of languages used in outreach materials and provide increased language assistance through the Partnership Program. There should be promotional resources in all the languages covered by the 2020 Census language guides, as well as in additional indigenous and African immigrant languages.

Native Americans are protected by the language minority and other provisions of the Voting Rights Act. In 2010, however, Native Americans living on reservations were among the most undercounted communities in the country. For the 2020 Census, no indigenous languages were offered for on-line and telephone responses, and only one indigenous language (Navajo) was included in additional resource support. The Census Bureau basically ignored the unique fiduciary relationship that Tribal governments have with the federal government by failing to accommodate the language needs of these communities. In Alaska, for example, the Bureau as well as other stakeholders relied extensively on outreach and assistance materials developed with philanthropic support, even though Alaska Natives are a significant part of Alaska’s population, and some are sufficiently populous to qualify for language assistance under the Voting Rights Act.

In concert with Tribal governments and Indigenous communities, the Bureau should develop and implement a comprehensive language assistance program for American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

The Bureau should vastly increase the number of languages it employs for official forms, telephone assistance, paid advertising, outreach materials, and staffing.



TESTING AND PROMOTION OF TRANSLATED MATERIALS AND ASSISTANCE IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

The more that all Americans, including those who are English-speaking, see efforts to ensure accessibility for immigrants and indigenous communities, the more they will encourage their non-English speaking family members, colleagues, customers, students, and neighbors to participate in the census. Before determining the 2020 slogan for its Get Out the Count campaign, the Bureau conducted significant messaging research including testing in the Official Languages designated for paid advertising. This approach represented an important improvement over past decennial censuses, and avoided problems that arose when the selected slogan could not be meaningfully translated into the covered languages. However, the Bureau did not test and provide translations of the slogan beyond the 14 Official Languages. Additionally, because of translation delays, the Bureau was unable to provide the translated logo and official slogan in the Official Languages simultaneously with the roll out of the English logo and slogan that the Bureau had rushed to make available for the “one year to Census Day” kick-off event. The initial English roll-out was an earned media opportunity that also could have been an effective opportunity to reach foreign language media. A simultaneous roll-out would have emphasized the fact that the census is for everyone. The delayed roll-out of the translated logo and slogan made it appear that households needing in-language assistance were not an enumeration priority for the Bureau.

The Bureau did not sufficiently test its translated materials across different geographies. In rural Eastern Washington, for example, the community organizers found that the Bureau’s Spanish materials were not usable for their community. The wording had meanings different from what was intended or was in the wrong dialect. In other areas (including a number of Asian subgroups) there is a link between limited English proficiency and household income. Therefore, surveys conducted only in English, or in just a limited number of languages, may produce inaccurate data because they fail to sufficiently capture information from all of the nation’s diverse population and distorts the results for communities with significant limited English proficient households.

- The Bureau should more effectively test translated materials in the field across a wider variety of geographies and more widely promote the availability of translated questionnaires, language guides, and telephone assistance in languages other than English. The slogan testing should be done in a greater number of languages than for the 2020 Census, in order to assist partners who will be doing outreach beyond the Official Languages.
- The Bureau should make the general public more directly aware that non-English-language response options, assistance, and materials are available in order to reinforce the understanding that the census is for everyone. The Bureau should roll out translated information and materials at the same time as English versions. Additionally, there should be targeted promotion (including paid advertising) of language response and assistance options in each of the relevant communities, both in English (for those communities who speak English but rely on media tailored to specific ethnic groups) and in the appropriate non-English languages.
- The Bureau should expand its messaging research to include additional non-English languages, as well as English-language content for ethnic communities.
- The Bureau should examine and strengthen its language access program for the American Community Survey and other surveys where race and ethnicity are an important focus of the research or are an important factor in the legitimacy of the data overall.

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BILINGUAL STAFFING

Bilingual staff are critical to the Bureau's ability to achieve an accurate count of many of the historically undercounted communities. Bilingual staff are particularly necessary as partnership specialists who often are called upon to recruit community-based organizations to serve as local partners and to give presentations at community events. They are also important as enumerators in the Nonresponse Follow-up phase of the field operations. Bilingual staff are especially important in areas where there is a significant population of immigrants who are illiterate in their own language. Because written materials are not effective in reaching immigrants who are illiterate even in their own language, bilingual staff can reach them by speaking at community events or by being interviewed on radio or local television.

In addition to recruiting enumerators, partnership specialists and other staff able to speak in the Official languages, the Bureau reported hiring thousands of bilingual enumerators and other staff reflecting many other languages and dialects. Apparently, however, the Bureau either did not have or did not share their target hiring goals or track bilingual hires by language and geography. As a result, the Bureau was unable to ensure sufficient hiring of culturally proficient bilingual enumerators for the neighborhoods most in need of assistance. Stakeholders reported persistent concerns about insufficient bilingual staffing in areas of need. Some bilingual staff noted that they were never utilized for their language skills. The language skills of applicants were not tested, rather, the Bureau relied on self-reported levels of fluency. The lack of tracking or, if tracking existed, public access to the hiring numbers, made it difficult for stakeholders to target recruiting efforts to help ensure the Bureau had linguistically and culturally appropriate staffing in each local area.

For the 2020 Census, (as well as in 2010 and 2000), one of the biggest barriers to ensuring sufficient, timely hiring of culturally competent, bilingual partnership specialists, enumerators, and other census staff, has been the federal rules that require hiring citizens for federal government jobs, including temporary positions. Since 2000, waivers of this law for temporary positions were eventually granted, but the process for securing a waiver has been slow and has occurred late in the recruitment and hiring timeline. This has created uncertainty among potential applicants. The citizenship requirement makes it confusing for applicants and difficult for community groups and other institutions to help the Bureau recruit an ideal work force. Adding to the confusion, the 2020 Census on-line hiring portal suggested that only citizens would be considered for census positions. In addition, the waiver only applied to enumerators. The Bureau should consider recruiting work-eligible, qualified noncitizens for other temporary positions that involve interaction with immigrant communities including recruitment assistants, Mobile Questionnaire Assistance staff, and partnership specialists.

- In local areas with concentrations of specific language minorities identified in the American Community survey or by state and local partners, the Bureau should set goals and track bilingual hires by language and geography for partnership specialists and enumerators with relevant language and cultural skills. The Bureau should share these goals and information on gaps to enable partners to better assist the Bureau with targeted recruitment.
- Regional Census Offices should hire bilingual staff at the regional as well as local level who can be deployed as needed across the region to supplement bilingual partnership specialists and enumerators assigned to specific locations. This will ensure more adequate support for government agencies and organizations engaged in Get Out the Count efforts.
- The Census Bureau should have targets for bilingual hiring that match local needs.
- The Bureau should seek a permanent waiver for hiring work-authorized bilingual noncitizens to meet language assistance needs in a timely, comprehensive way.





PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

THE BUREAU CAN NO LONGER RELY ON A MODEL THAT DEPENDS PRIMARILY ON A massive “seasonal” push one to two years before Census Day. Instead, the Bureau must build more consistent awareness of census planning throughout the decade and should expand its current efforts to create a significant ongoing public education campaign about the importance of the census.

The ten-year cycle of the census means that between each count, elected officials, institutions, corporations, community-based organizations, and philanthropy lose much of their institutional memory about the importance of the census to their work, its relevance to their constituencies, and the need to invest and plan for the next census. Because the census is not an annual program, philanthropy and state and local governments must begin planning at least three to four years in advance to make the kinds of investments required.

With declining private and public survey response rates over the past 20 years, the growth of privately collected data, heightened concerns over the Bureau’s ability to protect individual data, and an increasingly diverse and growing U.S. population, the Census Bureau has had to intensify its efforts to persuade Americans to complete their questionnaires. A growing part of that strategy depends on effective marketing and the engagement of trusted voices outside of the federal government. Technology can facilitate but not substitute for trusted relationships. Paid advertising is critical, but the explosive growth of media channels and platforms has fragmented viewership. And when, as in 2020, events such as the pandemic, Black Lives Matter, a contentious election cycle, and natural disasters occur, it is difficult for the Bureau’s message to break through.

The Bureau has steadily improved its Outreach and Promotion Program over the years. Notably, the Bureau moved away from its 1990 and 2000 approach which engaged effectively only with organizations on its formal advisory committees. In 2020, the Bureau used integrated teams including National Partnership, Community Partnership and Engagement, Census Open Innovation Labs, Public Information Office, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs and Statistics in the Schools. This chapter focuses on the National Partnership Program, the Community Partnership and Engagement Program, the Census Open Innovation Labs and Statistics in Schools.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Stakeholders found that an understanding of the uses of census data to improve their lives and communities is critical to persuading trusted voices to encourage census participation through their networks. In 2020, long time stakeholders such as the National Urban League, found the National Partnership Program to be extremely helpful throughout the Get Out the Count effort. The Bureau is continuing to reach out to partner organizations, with increased transparency around the data processing phase of the census. However, it is not efficient or effective to recreate relationships every 10 years employing staff who themselves are often new to the agency and the process. Although ongoing outreach may increase the annual budget, it will save tax dollars over the census lifecycle by easing the steep ramp-up in the last one or two years before the count and pay for itself in increased voluntary early self-response, reducing the need for the more costly door-to-door enumeration. The Bureau has begun to address this reality with its efforts to turn “Census in the Schools” into a permanent “Statistics in Schools” program. While the



program makes a wealth of data available on-line, keyed to various events on the calendar, it is underfunded, lagging in timely on-line information, and not well-marketed. The Bureau also has regional data dissemination specialists to help stakeholders access and understand census data, but this activity is not usually linked with partnership activities.

PARTNER CATEGORIES

Initially, the Program had over 20 partner categories. The following covers some key categories.

Philanthropy.

Although philanthropy was not a specifically named partner category in the Bureau's 2020 partnership plans, the Bureau assigned a senior career staff member at headquarters to be an official liaison to foundations and philanthropy-serving organizations for the first time. This liaison operated at the national level to ensure a fair and accurate count, particularly of historically undercounted communities. The Bureau liaison worked specifically with the Funders Census Initiative at the Funders Committee for Civic Participation as well as with a representative from the Bauman Foundation, helping to staff the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup that was funding national, state, and community-based census initiatives across the country. The liaison also worked with the Census Counts campaign housed at the Leadership Conference Education Fund. The Census Counts, Democracy Funders Census Subgroup, and Funders Census Initiative leaders worked with the liaison to organize regular meetings with the Bureau's Census 2020 leadership team, to discuss emerging issues related to LUCA, Get Out the Count, and workforce recruitment. Many of the Regional Census Bureau offices worked with the regional, state, and local foundations and philanthropic serving organizations.

The Census Counts Campaign and census funders created national and state networks that could rapidly disseminate information from the Bureau and could collect information about challenges unfolding in the field that could be shared with and resolved by the Bureau. The dedicated liaison helped philanthropy better understand where community-based organizations could fill gaps in census outreach, promotion, and recruitment. These relationships became even more crucial during the pandemic, when the Bureau had to frequently adjust its operational plan.

Philanthropic institutions and leaders also played important roles on the state and local level, often advocating for, and serving on Complete Count Committees. They helped to create public/private partnerships, helped state and local governments create and execute plans, and aided in distributing funding. Relationships with the regional and local Bureau offices were often important to the success of these partnerships. Yet in its first version of the Complete Count Committee Handbook, the Bureau did not include philanthropy on these committees. Further, philanthropy has not been represented on the Bureau's decennial census advisory committees, although an expert from a major foundation with a focus on children and families was recently appointed to the Census National Advisory Committee.

Community-based Organizations.

Thousands of organizations across the country participated in Get Out the Count activities in 2020. Stakeholders and local funders report that when well-trained, partnership specialists played an important role providing technical assistance and support for their efforts. Partnership specialists who have appropriate expertise can help the Bureau institutionalize relationships and can work with funders and community organizations to help keep the census and American Community Survey



at the top of the public's agenda. This staff corps can keep stakeholders informed about census data releases and uses of data that benefit their communities. The Bureau distributes numerous data products on-line, but many stakeholders are not aware of these resources.

Most community organizations are not familiar with the Bureau's network of Census Information Centers (CICs), which have access to data and training on how to understand the data. The network is comprised of colleges and universities, research organizations, minority chambers of commerce, civil rights organizations serving children, older Americans, rural populations, communities of color, and Tribal governments. They are national, regional and local in focus and are located in 20 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The CICs do not receive funding from the Bureau but are tasked with helping disseminate data from all Census Bureau surveys and programs. Regional partnership specialists should work with the CICs to ensure community access to data products and information about the relevance of the census and American Community Survey (ACS) to their communities.

Regional partnership specialists (discussed in the next subsection) and data specialists can also educate stakeholders about the ACS and other surveys particularly relevant to historically undercounted population groups. They can also develop strategies to help community organizations encourage their constituencies to respond to non-census surveys and help local educators increase participation in the *Statistics in Schools* program.

Business Community.

Business and industry can play an important role in the census by educating employees, vendors, and customers, and by providing in-kind and funding support for community outreach efforts. Small business owners are often trusted leaders in their communities, particularly in historically undercounted areas. Evaluations of Earned Income Tax Credit outreach efforts found that disseminating information through employers helped increase awareness and participation in the program. See, for example, Thomson, D., Gennetian, L. A., Chen, Y., Barnett, H., Carter, M., & Deambrosi, S. (2020). **State policy and practice related to Earned Income Tax Credits may affect receipt among Hispanic families.** Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

Efforts to partner with corporations and business leaders was a weak spot in the 2020 Census partnership program. Concerns about the controversial effort to add a citizenship question, combined with broader politicization of the census resulting from that question, appeared to depress business engagement in the 2020 Census. Staff turnover at the Bureau in the period before the census exacerbated the problem. The Bureau and stakeholders worked together to reach out to potential corporate partners but had only limited success. In addition, many businesses did not understand the importance of the census beyond its role in allocating political representation, and they did not get a clear signal from the Administration about the need to engage. Outreach to the business community was just beginning to gain traction when the pandemic massively disrupted the economy, shifting the focus of many small businesses to survival and forcing larger ones to modify their modus operandi. The abrupt shutdown of many in-person business activities reduced opportunities to promote the census to customers. Corporations also wanted examples of past business community engagement, which the Bureau was slow to produce.

The Bureau is currently working with other Commerce Department agencies to educate businesses and develop more institutionalized support for the full range of Bureau statistical programs and data resources. Evergreen outreach to the business community deserves greater funding, with an emphasis on educating small business owners about ways that census data can inform their planning and investment decisions. Many businesses have an interest in ensuring that students are comfortable using numbers, and adults to participate in surveys that help inform their businesses and guide policymakers. Businesses could and should be doing more to support the Census Bureau's programs through educating their employees, suppliers and customers and through using their philanthropic arms to support Statistics in the Schools.

Educational Institutions and Agencies Working with Families.

Philanthropy and stakeholder groups found that educational institutions were generally unaware of and unprepared to assist with Get Out the Count efforts or to effectively promote census participation. Given the timing of the various census field operations, teachers, staff, and students at community colleges, universities and other adult learning institutions, are potential sources for the part time enumerators and other staff the Bureau needs to recruit each decade. In addition, teachers and other school staff are trusted voices to parents and can help educate students and their parents about the census. Adult students are often parents of young children and are an important audience for messages about the importance of counting young children, including infants.

In 2020, philanthropy supported the Partnership for America's Children, which coordinates a network of organizations focused on children's issues to address concerns about the persistent undercount of young children. The Partnership formed a campaign called *Count All Kids*. The campaign commended the Bureau for conducting research on the causes of the young child undercount and for a mailing to 14 million family households highlighting the importance of including all children on their census form. This outreach should be repeated in 2030. The Partnership appreciated the Bureau's engagement with experts on children's issues, which included seeking input on research and operations and keeping them apprised of findings. The engagement also helped the Partnership identify gaps in messaging research that needed to be filled. However, the relationship with Bureau was established only in 2018, after many important decisions had already been made. The Bureau should appoint a liaison who has responsibility for working with external stakeholders to improve the accuracy and quality of data on young children. The liaison would report to the deputy director and work across directorates to promote sound research and best practices in the decennial census, the American Community Survey, and other relevant surveys.

Rural Organizations.

The pandemic exacerbated existing barriers to achieving an accurate census count in rural areas. Lack of access to highspeed broadband and affordable technology continue to hamper census operations, making stronger, consistent partnerships in these communities even more essential. The digital divide in rural areas undermined the Bureau's efforts to recruit a local workforce that understands the geography and culture of rural areas. The Bureau's insufficient understanding of the most effective communications channels in rural areas as well as the nature of rural housing, undermined its ability to plan and execute communications campaigns and update Master Address Files. The Bureau should work with rural advocacy and social organizations and agencies at the national, state, and local levels, such as Farm Bureaus and 4H clubs, to develop targeted materials and robust advertising and outreach activities. The Bureau should also identify corporations with a presence in rural areas, encourage them to support census activities, and provide assistance in developing relevant employee education materials. As an example, Tyson Foods, Inc. in Arkansas was active in outreach to its employees for Census 2020.

Federal Agencies and Government Programs.

There are a number of federal programs in various agencies that could be employed to help ensure broader public awareness of the importance of the census and educate businesses about how they can participate. The Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration, and the Department of Labor interact with countless businesses every year. Those relationships could strengthen the Census Bureau's new enterprise partnerships to help support



its economic surveys. The Small Business Administration and the Minority Business Development Administration could help the Bureau build awareness and engagement around the census and ongoing economic surveys. Small business owners are often very trusted voices in their communities.

The Department of Homeland Security could add a question related to the census as part of the naturalization exam so that immigrants will learn about the census as they strive to become citizens. The Department of Health and Human Services [and Housing and Urban Development (HUD)] could encourage health facilities receiving HHS funding — such as hospitals and community centers, whose staff are trusted community voices — to promote census participation among their patients and to reassure households that the Census Bureau does not share responses with any public or private agencies at any level of government. HUD can support Census Bureau efforts to educate landlords and building managers about their legal responsibility to ensure access to their properties and to cooperate with field staff trying to verify occupancy status and, if necessary, to gather basic information about occupants of nonresponding households. HUD should also remind tenants in subsidized housing that the Census Bureau will not share their responses with any other government agency, including HUD, or any private entity, and that their responses can never be used to displace them from their homes.

The Department of Education can help build awareness of the census through colleges, community colleges, Head Start and K-12 institutions, as well as awareness of the Statistics in Schools program, by leveraging the trusted voice of teachers and other education staff. The Department of Agriculture can help promote outreach to difficult-to-reach rural communities through its rural business and household support programs, as well as through foodbanks.

Community Action Agencies (CAA) are nonprofit and public organizations funded through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program. They provide direct services to households that have been historically undercounted and are trusted messengers.

- The Bureau should strengthen and maintain its Partnership Programs throughout the decade and build on the relationships established for the 2020 Census at the national and regional levels. The Bureau should have a sufficient number of permanent national and regional partnership specialists, working in concert with regional data dissemination specialists, who engage and inform key local constituencies throughout the decade.
- The Bureau should build on relationships with philanthropy initiated during the 2010 Census and expanded during the 2020 Census. It should engage funders and other philanthropic institutions early in 2030 Census planning, the American Community Survey, and other data collection programs and provide greater transparency about census planning and operational decisions. The Bureau should work to better understand foundation processes and work with funders to leverage philanthropic resources in a timely way. Philanthropy, in turn, can benefit from a better understanding of the timeline for census design and operational decisions in order to plan workable grantmaking schedules. The Bureau should develop resources specifically about the importance of the role of philanthropy, providing specific examples of partners on the local and state level.
- The Bureau should invest in maintaining and institutionalizing relationships with national and local community-based organizations. In particular, the Bureau's headquarters and regional offices should work with the Bureau's network of Census Information Centers to host periodic briefings to local partners and better ensure they understand what data is available and how best to access it.

The Bureau should strengthen and maintain its Partnership Programs throughout the decade and build on the relationships established for the 2020 Census at the national and regional levels.

- The Bureau's corporate partnership program should be retooled to ensure that companies of all sizes understand the role the census plays in matters relevant to their businesses and the communities they serve. The Bureau should document specific examples of business support for Get Out the Count efforts in 2020 and develop and disseminate materials targeting business leaders from a wide range of economic sectors earlier in the 2030 Census cycle. Relationships with local chambers of commerce and business establishments, particularly those with members from or serving historically undercounted communities, should be maintained throughout the decade, in part to address eleventh-hour controversies more easily. In addition, the Bureau should explore ways to engage businesses in support of Statistics in Schools.
- The Bureau should increase its national and regional partnerships with educational institutions, including community colleges, technical schools, and universities, as well as professional educational associations. In particular, the Bureau should connect with the Bureau of Indian Education, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving institutions.
- The Bureau should maintain and build on its partnerships with organizations and experts focused on child and family issues.
- The Bureau should establish more robust, comprehensive, and consistent outreach to rural areas. Its outreach programs must take into account the digital divide that persists in these areas and the culture of rural communities.
- The Census Bureau's National Partnership Program should expand outreach to other federal agencies to better leverage opportunities that will ensure broader public awareness of the importance of the census.
- The Bureau should support additional funding for federally funded service programs such as Community Action Agencies, health clinics, and head start programs to support efforts to integrate census education and outreach into their work.

COMPLETE COUNT COMMITTEES

The Bureau officially reaches out to state governmental leadership to encourage them to take the necessary steps to create official state level complete count committees. For the 2020 census, some states like Texas did not create a state level committee and other states like Florida announced a committee that barely met. Several states created committees but did not fund them. Complete count committees were created also at the county and city level and by nonprofit networks. There were many highly effective Complete Count Committees with creative approaches and partnerships. The Funders Census Initiative at the Funders Committee for Civic Participation website has evaluation reports from funders across the country which link to materials and provide examples of what works. The Bureau did create a toolkit for forming complete count committees.

- The Bureau should analyze successful 2020 Complete Count Committees and update its toolkit based on successful elements, providing more examples of different structures and a more comprehensive menu of effective strategies and tactics.



GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR PARTNERS

Two years before the census, philanthropy reached out to the National Governors Association (NGA), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the National Association of Counties (NACo), the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and subsequently the National League of Cities (NLC). Few of these groups had plans in place or the capacity to engage their members around the actual count, which they saw, ultimately, as the federal government's responsibility. While the Bureau works to ensure that state government officials are briefed on preparations and programs to prepare for the delivery of redistricting data, there is less focus on the actual count process. The Bureau needs to engage state and local elected and appointed officials in planning for the census throughout the decade so they understand its importance and have a higher degree of awareness. The Bureau should seek ways to engage associations that train and provide technical assistance to state and local government officials and staff, as well as the governmental units themselves. The schedule for engagement should take into account the multi-year budget cycles of state and local government entities.



Some governors understood the importance of an accurate census to the fair allocation of federal funding for their states, prompting them to invest in outreach activities. However, others appeared to be unaware of the need to prioritize census planning and were slow to create and convene Complete Count Committees. Some state Complete Count Committees were not sufficiently staffed or funded by their state legislatures and governors.

Philanthropy supported NCSL, NACo and NLC efforts to create formal census initiatives. The NCSL is keenly aware of the census because of the role its members play in redistricting. The Bureau's redistricting staff was in close contact with NCSL staff, but the Bureau staff who focused on census operations were not as engaged with this important constituency. As a result, many state legislatures did not realize that they should consider appropriating funds for Complete Count Committees and Get Out the Count activities several years before peak census operations. Significant turnover of state-level elected officials and political staff throughout each decade also contributed to the loss of institutional knowledge that might prompt government officials to take more timely action to support the Census Bureau's efforts.

Some local leaders understood the importance of proposing municipal investments early enough to be considered in a timely budget cycle. The U.S. Conference of Mayors, the NACo, and the NLC, for example, saw the importance of the census to federal funding of programs important to their cities and were engaged in the effort to ensure the Bureau had sufficient funding.

Stakeholders have long suggested that to reach historically undercounted communities and population groups, the Bureau should fund outreach activities by state, local and Tribal governments. The Bureau has resisted this because, as a statistical agency, it lacks the infrastructure and expertise on local communities to successfully administer a grant program. However, there are other agencies within the Department of Commerce and across the federal government that do have extensive experience with grantmaking and perhaps could take on the responsibility or provide a model for a workable program. The 2020 apportionment results indicate that state

and local investment in Get Out the Count efforts may have made a difference in the level of overall participation because a record number of organizations were able to engage with funding from some states, counties and municipalities, as well as from philanthropy. And while philanthropy raised a record amount of funding to support census outreach campaigns, it is not positioned — nor should it be — to invest in the level of funding required to support state and local efforts to supplement the Bureau's own promotion and outreach programs.

The growing distrust of the federal government increases the need for trusted voices at the local level to promote census participation. However, community-based nonprofits are always overstretched and unable to engage substantially without additional resources. While providing grants directly to community-based groups across the country may be prohibitively complicated for a number of reasons, the federal government provides funding to Tribal, state and local governments for other purposes that eventually flow to nonprofit organizations. A matching grant program would encourage states and localities to invest a reasonable amount of their own resources. Because of their special treaty status, Tribal governments should be consulted separately about an appropriate program. Elements to consider in grant programs include capping grant amounts at a specified level and establishing tiered levels of available grants based on population size, percent of population at greatest risk of undercounting, percent of low self-response census tracts, and prevalence of rural communities. The grant applications should favor initiatives that feature well-constructed Complete Count Committees and public/private collaborations with philanthropy that can help ensure the flows of the matching federal funds to trusted community-based organizations.

By their nature, federal and state government funding requirements are more rigid than rules governing philanthropic institution investments. Typically, only larger nonprofit organizations have the capacity and experience to compete for funding, negotiate with government agencies, and comply with often onerous reporting and other requirements. During the 2020 Census cycle, there were several state, city and county private/public partnerships that included philanthropic organizations. By collaborating with philanthropy, these important initiatives enabled funding to reach a greater range of smaller nonprofits that are the most credible, trusted voices that can overcome the hesitancy of populations more likely to be missed in the census.

- Four to five years before the start of the census, the Bureau should begin outreach to state, county, local, and Tribal governments, and support Get Out the Count preparations, to begin preparing for the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) operation and to encourage creation of Complete Count Committees.
- The Administration should propose, and Congress should fund, a grant program within the Department of Commerce to provide an appropriate level of support for census outreach by Tribal, state, and local governments, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- The Census Bureau should explore investing in other governmental infrastructure opportunities, such as the 2-1-1 hotlines that many states and counties operate with the United Way, to promote census participation. Philanthropy supported the United Way to implement a census 2-1-1 hotline program in Texas and a few other states to help with 2020 outreach.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM: PARTNERSHIP SPECIALISTS

Partnership specialists play a critical role in helping the Bureau engage and inform stakeholder groups at the state and local, as well as national, levels. Over 80% of the funders investing in 2020 Census activities when surveyed in an evaluation commissioned by the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup, found the partnership specialists to be helpful to their census work. For 2020, the Bureau planned to begin hiring partnership specialists two years before the count to educate and engage state, local and Tribal elected and agency officials and their staffs. This included business leaders, educational, health, and other institutions working with children and families, and community-based organizations and foundations — many of whom had not been involved in the previous census and who viewed the census solely as a federal responsibility. Unfortunately, the hiring was delayed for months and the Bureau was unable to meet its hiring goals. However, even under the intended plan, the timetable for launching and building effective outreach left insufficient time for philanthropy and local governments to fully marshal resources and networks.

Stakeholders interviewed for this report were able to forge strong partnerships when the specialists had sufficient training and expertise and when there was low turnover. However, before the 2020 Census, unemployment was low, presenting the Bureau with a significant challenge to recruit, hire, and retain enough staff for a range of temporary positions. (The pandemic changed the employment landscape considerably, of course, creating different barriers to sustaining a sufficient field workforce.) The insufficient number of partnership staff and inability of the Bureau to meet its hiring targets undermined the Bureau's ability to fully leverage the expertise and networks of partner organizations and hampered Get Out the Count planning for groups on the ground.

There is universal support among census funders and stakeholders for an evergreen partnership program that allows the Bureau to continue engaging national and community-based organizations, as well as state and local governments, throughout the census development and planning process. Permanent partnership specialists assigned to Bureau headquarters and Regional Census Offices can help the agency preserve a healthy level of interest and knowledge among key constituencies about decennial census planning throughout the decade, thereby lowering the steep learning curve for many stakeholder organizations late in the cycle. In addition, having a greater number of partnership specialists with broader and more extensive knowledge of the census will enable a core to be able to assist regional and local philanthropy and stakeholders in their strategic planning and do more than hand out materials and provide speakers on census basics when the time comes to ramp up for the count.

The Bureau sometimes was able to hire knowledgeable, skilled community leaders associated with community-based groups. Other partnership specialists, however, had steeper learning curves with respect to census procedures and community networks and dynamics, and needed time to build relationships with local leaders. In some areas of the country, the Bureau did not meet its hiring goals for partnership specialists, resulting in coverage gaps. These gaps appear to have occurred more often in largely rural states such as Alaska and Montana and were a particular problem for Indian country.

In addition, because of the steep ramp-up over a relatively short period of time, many areas experienced high turnover, as partnership specialists were reassigned, rapidly promoted internally to other positions, or resigned to take other jobs. As a result, local and state groups repeatedly had to educate and build relationships with new people who had inconsistent training and knowledge. The extreme reduction in the number of local census offices compared to 2010 meant that partnership specialists in some regions were spread thin and had to travel to different states, leaving many areas with inadequate support. The geographic vastness of certain assignment areas meant that some partnership specialists were not sufficiently familiar with the



communities they served. In some areas, the partnership specialists reportedly relied on community organizations for information, outreach strategies, and materials.

Many partnership specialists, who are temporary hires, do not receive sufficient training, and most do not have experience working with the Census Bureau. Their often-limited knowledge of census operations and rules may not enable them to be helpful strategists for Complete Count Committees and other partners. In some states, funders and stakeholders reported that the specialists did not seem to have a strategic plan for outreach and did not develop relationships with the range of key partners, such as school leaders, necessary to support the Bureau's Statistics in the Schools program.

In addition, it was widely reported that at critical phases, some partnership specialists did not have the correct information. These lapses included knowing whether a citizenship question was still on the form, knowing if work eligible noncitizens could apply for enumeration jobs, knowing where college students should be counted and knowing whether households in Update/Leave areas that had not received their census packets because of pandemic disruptions could respond by telephone or on-line. Some stakeholders reported that community-based organizations sometimes had a more accurate understanding of the census and were more current with Bureau information than the Bureau's own partnership specialists.

Sometimes groups leading census outreach were not introduced to the partnership specialists assigned to their communities. In some regions, the Bureau did not share organizational charts and contact information for key staff interacting with the public. As a result, community groups did not always know who their partnership specialists were, when new staff joined or replaced those originally assigned to their area, or the type of assistance to expect. The lack of useful information — a particular problem in rural settings — left partner organizations and Complete Count Committees unable to direct questions from their constituencies to the appropriate Bureau staff person. Given the size of the Partnership Program workforce, it is difficult for the Bureau to ensure consistent onboarding, including introduction to key community leaders, training, and regular briefings, to ensure consistency of quality work throughout the country. There were reports that on-line training was constantly in flux (especially and understandably during the pandemic) and did not provide thorough explanations of all relevant aspects of the census or prepare specialists for a full range of likely questions. Some stakeholders encountered partnership specialists who were not responsive, were unfamiliar with their assigned communities, or were generally ineffective. However, these partners were reluctant to identify those specialists for fear that it would further sour a relationship on which they depended for the success of their own efforts.

- The Bureau should maintain a team of permanent national and regional partnership specialists to support ongoing engagement with national and local partners throughout the decade.
- The Bureau should ensure a sufficient number of partnership specialists to support decennial census activities. The Bureau should begin hiring additional regional and local partnership specialists for the decennial census before LUCA starts and complete its hiring two to three years in advance of the start of peak operations. Earlier hiring of partnership specialists will help ensure that philanthropy and other key organizations have relevant information to guide investment and planning for supplemental outreach and promotion campaigns. In particular, Tribal Partnership Specialists should start their work assignments earlier in the census cycle to build effective relationships with Tribal governments and others. This means beginning to ramp up the hiring of additional partnership specialists earlier in the decade in order to expand outreach in preparation for the Local Update of Census Addresses operation and the creation of Complete Count Committees.

The Bureau should maintain a team of permanent national and regional partnership specialists to support ongoing engagement with national and local partners throughout the decade.

- The Bureau should ensure more thorough onboarding, as well as initial and ongoing training, for partnership specialists. The Bureau should provide greater supervision to ensure more consistent quality of work. The Bureau should create an avenue for partners to offer feedback on the partnership specialists without fear of retribution.
- The Bureau should provide more clarity on the role of partnership specialists and the territory and constituencies each specialist covers. The Bureau should also create a publicly accessible on-line database of partnership specialists including contact information or some other effective way for state and local partners to identify and contact them.
- Stakeholders recommend that partnership specialists receive a list of the state and local offices responsible for and involved in LUCA and Get Out the Count activities (e.g., state demographers, data centers, governor's staff, key county and municipal officials, tribal leaders, etc.) when that information is available, as well as a list of key philanthropic, community, and business organizations. A database of 2020 Census partner organizations in each state could be a helpful starting point. Partnership specialists may also benefit from seeing evaluations that foundations and stakeholders engaged in the 2020 Census are producing. These assessments generally include observations about operational elements that worked well and those that were not as effective.

PARTNERSHIP MATERIALS

Stakeholders appreciated the efforts the Bureau made to develop generic materials for use in their Get Out the Count activities. For 2020, the Bureau developed a variety of materials for community groups and government agencies to use, but these were difficult to locate on the Bureau's website. In addition, many groups and agencies did not have sufficient funding to print Bureau-created materials even when they could find it on-line. In 2010, the Bureau made greater quantities of printed materials available.

- The Bureau should create and distribute (in print form) a wider range of partnership materials, including in more languages, that community groups can access easily on-line.
- To address illiteracy, the Bureau should produce partnership materials that rely more on engaging and eye-catching graphics rather than text. These materials should include audio and video resources.

CENSUS BUREAU COMMITTEES

During the previous Administration, the charters of the Bureau's two advisory committees lapsed, and members completed their terms without the selection of candidates to replace them, resulting in the absence of a quorum. The committees were also insufficiently staffed, and meetings were canceled. As a result, the Bureau lost access to critical input during the final year of census preparations and implementation of the enumeration, and the public lost insight into the Bureau's preparedness level.

For 2000 and 2010, the Census Bureau had advisory committees focused exclusively on the decennial census and had plans to do so for the 2020 Census, but the previous administration failed to follow through. Unlike the Census National Advisory Committee (CNAC) and Census Scientific Advisory Committee (CSAC), decennial census committee members traditionally were organizations representing key stakeholders and communities, rather than individual experts on specific issues and population groups. The difference is important, because, for example, the current CNAC membership does not include representatives of state and local governments,



veterans, or the business community. Therefore, the Bureau should take steps to create an advisory committee for the 2030 Census as soon as possible, to ensure that an appropriate range of decennial census stakeholders can advise the Bureau on all aspects of the 2030 Census process from the start of the census cycle.

- The Bureau should ensure that its advisory committees are fully operational and sufficiently staffed at all times.
- The Bureau should create a 2030 Census Advisory Committee as soon as practicable; the membership should include a representative from philanthropy.

PARTNERSHIPS AND DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

A primary tenet of the Census Bureau's mission is to protect the confidentiality of census data to prevent the identification of persons and households counted in the census, as required by the Census Act (13 U.S.C. §9). The Bureau strives to achieve this goal by applying so-called *disclosure avoidance* methods to the raw data it collects before publishing statistics. Since the 2010 Census, advancements in computing power and the availability of personal data in commercial datasets have made it easier for bad actors to potentially reverse engineer household information, leading to re-identification of persons. These new threats to data confidentiality led the Bureau to explore new approaches to disclosure avoidance. In 2017, the Bureau announced its decision to use a method called *differential privacy*, which the private sector had been using for some time. Unfortunately, though, the Bureau largely failed to consult with and engage external stakeholders in the decision-making process before rolling out the new method in its official 2020 Census Memorandum. Because of this lack of sufficient outreach and engagement as well as the technical complexity of the method, opposition and distrust of the approach grew quickly and began to undermine public trust in the utility and accuracy of 2020 Census data.

To its credit, the Bureau addressed the growing chorus of concern by partnering with the Committee on National Statistics to hold a public workshop in December 2018. It then released a series of demonstration products to ensure that application of the DAS would not make the data unfit for its many uses. Still, initial efforts to seek stakeholder feedback were done without sufficient transparency, context and explanation. The Bureau eventually ramped up its outreach with helpful additional demonstration products, webinars, and blogs, but confidence in the decision-making process had already been shaken. At the same time, stakeholders and partner organizations were trying to adapt Get Out the Count activities to pandemic-related operational delays and deal with the previous Administration's opaque changes to the census timeline. By the time the dust cleared on the data collection phase of the census, stakeholders did not have sufficient time to gain full confidence in the new methodology.

The Bureau faces a difficult challenge in balancing the need to protect the confidentiality of personal census data with its goal of publishing useful and usable data for redistricting and many other important purposes. Looking forward to the 2030 Census, as well as to the publication of data from ongoing surveys such as the ACS, the Bureau should ensure ample time for meaningful stakeholder engagement about disclosure avoidance system issues regardless of whether differential privacy or another method is considered the best approach.

- The Partnership Programs should cover more than Get Out the Count efforts. For example, the Bureau should use the programs to engage appropriate stakeholders much earlier in the process of refining and developing new disclosure avoidance systems (DAS).

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STATISTICS IN THE SCHOOLS

One of the most enduring ways to reduce the need for costly decennial outreach and education campaigns is to educate residents from an early age about the importance of the census to American democracy and its relationship to policies and services that help their families and communities. Schools are an obvious place to ensure that Americans grow up understanding the importance of the census and for reaching and educating the parents of young children who are disproportionately undercounted in the census. Additionally, a majority of children under the age of 5 in the United States are children of color, a trend that is expected to continue. One in four children have at least one immigrant parent. Immigrant and people of color households have historically been more likely to be undercounted in the census than White nonimmigrant households. Teachers and school administrators are trusted voices for parents, particularly immigrant parents and can play an important role in encouraging these households to participate in the census. Also, many people who work in education are potential recruits for the census workforce because of the seasonality of their work. Older students attending community colleges and universities are potential recruits and are often trusted by immigrant parents who rely on them to help navigate through government functions. Some of them are parents of young children themselves.

The Bureau realized the important role of schools when it created *Census in the Schools* for the 2010 Census. The program evolved into the ongoing *Statistics in Schools* program offering activities for students and resources for teachers that highlight the census, the data it collects, and ways to use the data. Activities are designed to align with existing school curricula and to supplement studies in math, geography, history, English language arts, and sociology, with all activities incorporating statistics and data-oriented concepts. However, there is insufficient staffing and investment in the project during between census years and very little promotion of the program beyond what the Bureau distributes on-line.

The Bureau decided late to expand the Statistics in Schools program to cover Head Start and create new materials, particularly in Spanish. The delay prevented efforts to maximize awareness among teachers and to effectively incorporate relevant lesson plans. Many public schools are understaffed, and teachers must meet curriculum requirements, leaving little time to search for census lesson plans. In addition, public schools attended by children of color, children of immigrants, and those in low-income communities, especially in rural areas, often do not have sufficient funding for supplies. At the same time, the Bureau has cut back significantly on distributing printed lesson materials.



For 2020, the Bureau did not sufficiently engage the education community in the development of materials, so there was limited awareness and buy-in for distributing these resources. For the 2020 Census, the Bureau established a partnership with the National Education Association, but this occurred too late to fully leverage the materials. Education partners should include professional and labor associations such as the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, National Association of Bilingual Educators, and Teach for America, as well as English as a Second Language experts and teachers, naturalization programs, community colleges, and immigrant language schools. Materials should be in more languages than Spanish and English and extend beyond elementary and secondary schools. Investments also need to be made to broaden the relevance of content for different kinds of students and teaching environments. For example, teachers with significant Native American student populations, particularly in tribal areas, will be more likely to use more content that contains lessons that are more appropriate to their environments.

- The Bureau should invest greater resources in the Statistics in Schools program and in outreach to the education community throughout the decade.
- In addition to Head Start programs, the Bureau should work with agencies that administer Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and the Children's Health Insurance Program.
- The Bureau should expand Statistics in Schools materials to incorporate information relevant to American Indian reservations and off-reservation trust lands, especially for states with significant Tribal and Native and indigenous populations, such as Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii.
- The Bureau should work with educators to develop and execute a more effective plan for incorporating census lessons in school curricula throughout the decade.
- Regional Census Bureau offices and partnership specialists should make it a priority to introduce Statistics in Schools to educators at the local level, as well as to agencies that serve families with children. The Bureau should work with school boards, principals, and teacher associations, that make decisions about what will be taught in classrooms.
- Because Statistics in Schools produces coloring books and other materials that can be used outside of schools, the Bureau should also engage libraries and agencies working with the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) programs, Medicaid and state child care agencies, and agencies that run the Child and Adult Care Food programs.

The Bureau should invest greater resources in the Statistics in Schools program and in outreach to the education community throughout the decade.

CENSUS OPEN INNOVATION LABS (COIL)

COIL brings together government, business, and community experts to develop new approaches to the challenges of the census via user-centered design, data, creative media, and technology. For 2020, the program created useful toolkits to help communities create and facilitate brainstorming sessions and create compelling digital media for 2020 Get Out the Count efforts. COIL reached out to the advertising industry to develop toolkits engaging diverse stakeholders in media, entertainment, and tech industries through “pop-up sessions,” called Census Solutions Workshops and Create-a-thons. These sessions engaged national and local census stakeholders and volunteers with creative skills from advertising agencies, design firms, and content strategy firms. The sessions made census work fun and generated thousands of culturally relevant digital assets and creative outreach visuals, including memes, for reaching historically undercounted households via digital channels that could be used by community-based organizations and trusted voices. This effort was critical in helping to fill the need for user-generated content.

COIL also worked with the Department of Commerce to foster tech sprints, which supported private sector efforts to develop and test tech products that would aid Get Out the Count efforts via their tech and data accelerator, The Opportunity Project (TOP). The program is now holding summits to build awareness of the data collected by the Census Bureau.

COIL is able to be more nimble than most Census Bureau programs, and its focus on user-centered design is critical to developing materials that are effective in engaging the multitude of audiences and volunteers the Bureau needs to harness the massive outreach required for the decennial census. However, COIL's staffing and budget has been too limited to meet the demand for its support once word spread about the efficacy of these approaches, particularly hosting “create-a-thon” gatherings that brought together volunteer creative talent with community outreach census experts. The effort could have even greater reach if it had been better integrated with field operations, perhaps with staffing embedded in each region. These programs sometimes work too independently of each other, resulting in both external and internal confusion about their respective missions and in missed opportunities for synergy. Best practices are not easily shared among the different partnership operations. There does not appear to be a comprehensive set of strategies, even for evaluation, and different offices are not always aware of the related work others are doing.

- The Bureau should increase staffing and funding for Census Open Innovation Labs (COIL) to help modernize its approaches to developing and supporting partnership engagement and the use of technology.
- The Bureau should better integrate and clarify the roles of the National Partnerships, COIL, and Regional Partnerships Programs.





COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

THE CENSUS BUREAU INCORPORATED SOME OF THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2010 Census and sought to adapt to the changing media landscape in 2020. Digital media was in its infancy in 2010, so the Census Bureau needed to develop a new strategy for 2020 while also taking into account the persistent digital divide facing many historically undercounted communities. In 2020, the media environment was impacted by both the lack of digital accessibility among historically undercounted audiences and the loss of advertising opportunities as venues and businesses shut down due to the pandemic. Ethnic media outlets (particularly print) were hit especially hard in the economic downturn.

Importantly, learning from 2010, the Census Bureau integrated its partnership work with the communications plan to improve coordination and better leverage investments. Also, in the face of very low unemployment before the pandemic, the Census Bureau invested in paid advertising to support recruitment efforts. It also increased the amount of messaging research in various languages.

The Census Bureau significantly improved certain aspects of the paid advertising campaign compared to 2010. For example, the overall diversity reflected in the mass advertising content included people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and an increased focus on young children. The 2020 Census slogan was tested in various languages to make sure the translation would be understood. The Census Bureau's Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander content showed better sensitivity to the diversity of the AAPI community in both the casting and scripting.

In addition, the Census Bureau set aside part of its budget to address unexpected issues and needs that might arise during the field operations and in response to the pandemic, and significantly increased the number of covered languages in some advertising mediums from 13 to 45. The extension of the self-reporting phase, the lengthy interruption of the Update/Leave operation, and the delay of the door-to-door enumeration required the Census Bureau to continually revise communications contracts, add earned media opportunities, and shift paid placements — for example, adjusting its television advertising plans when sports and other programming were curtailed because of the pandemic.

The Census Bureau made significant investments in new methods of paid communications, although it was unable to take advantage of the most cutting-edge technology. The Census Bureau's introduction of content creation for the partnership program was extremely helpful.

While there were many improvements over previous census efforts, some problems persisted in the Census Bureau approach to paid advertising aimed at historically undercounted population groups. In an evaluation survey commissioned by funders, more than a third of those who responded felt the Bureau's advertising campaign did not do a good job of reaching the audiences the respondents cared about. One reason may have been that the Census Bureau continues to treat communities at greater risk of being missed as if they comprise a small minority of the population, when in fact, populations at greater risk of undercounting collectively represent a significant portion of the census universe. Indeed, in a growing number of states and counties, people of color are already a majority of the population. The Bureau's budget and approach to paid advertising programs needs to better reflect this new reality. The mass advertising program aimed at most households notifies the public that the census is being taken, reminds people why it is important, and tells them how to respond. For historically undercounted communities, however, the advertising needs to be adapted into content that is more likely to reach and be trusted by these households. It must also persuade reluctant or fearful households to overcome their concerns and participate.



While the advertising content for the diverse mass and Asian American audiences improved from 2010, serious issues persisted with the Native American content. Many Native American organizations reported that the content failed to capture the diversity of Native American tribes and environments and was, as a result, not persuasive. American Indians living on reservations were among the most undercounted demographic groups in 2010.

THE ADVERTISING CONTRACT

In 2020, as in 2010, the Census Bureau invited bids from large mainstream advertising firms that typically include in their bid subcontractors with expertise in reaching the communities viewed by the Census Bureau as at high risk of being undercounted. In 2020, Y&R won the bid as the prime contractor and worked with a number of subcontractors and consultants charged with addressing the needs of specific racial or ethnic audiences including African American/Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, Arab American, Asian American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Puerto Rican. This structure created persistent problems due to lack of transparency and financial conflicts of interest between the prime contractor and the subcontractors.

The structure of the request for proposals resulted in budgetary decisions that often did not best serve the objective of reaching and persuading historically undercounted groups covered by the subcontractors. Often, when assembling their bids, prime contractors had insufficient knowledge of the actual costs required to effectively reach historically undercounted audiences and they persistently under-resourced the work and buys needed to effectively reach the target audiences. Bidders tended to base cost assumptions on basic population shares, ignoring the diversity and language needs within different populations that make them more expensive to serve. Because the prime contractor keeps the profits from the mass audience spend, it has an incentive to maximize that budget even though subcontractors must reach audiences that require more work to reach and persuade. Given the fact that people of color, who have been disproportionately undercounted in previous censuses, now make up over 40 percent of the U.S. population, this approach does not make sense.

In addition, the 2020 bidding process limited the ability of the Census Bureau to ensure it was getting the best expertise for each market segment because the best firm might be in partnership with a competing bidder. For some of the target populations, there are a very limited number of firms with the necessary expertise and capacity to develop and implement a campaign as vast and consequential as a census requires.

Finally, the research that drives much of the messaging and media planning is dependent on the prime contractor. This research approach needs to be re-evaluated. De-emphasizing the role of the prime contractor in the research process might possibly help this problem.

- The Census Bureau should increase the share of the advertising budget targeting historically undercounted communities and population groups to sufficiently and effectively reach and persuade them to participate.
- Before developing the request for proposals, the Census Bureau should set self-response goals for each targeted historically undercounted population that contractors must seek to meet, rather than establishing one collective goal that incentivizes contractors to be biased against investing in more expensive outreach to historically undercounted communities. It should also independently determine the cost of effective advertising to each of the targeted historically undercounted populations, rather than depending on the budgets developed by prime contractors who, in the past, have sought to maximize the more profitable mass audience spend at the expense of subcontractor advertising targeted at historically undercounted communities.

The Census Bureau should increase the share of the advertising budget targeting historically undercounted communities and population groups to sufficiently and effectively reach and persuade them to participate.

- The Census Bureau should re-evaluate the bidding process and the relationship between the prime agency and the contractors focused on populations most at risk for being undercounted. The Census Bureau should consider a separate request for proposal process or some other system to gain access to the most expert firms. An alternative model to consider would be to change the financial role of the prime agency media buyer. Instead of specifically acting as the “Diverse Mass” (generally meaning English-language) agency media buyer, this would position the buyer to work in concert with subcontractors who, in turn, will work with their own media buyers. This would also help to further highlight and prioritize the work of the subcontractors with expertise in various racial and ethnic audiences.

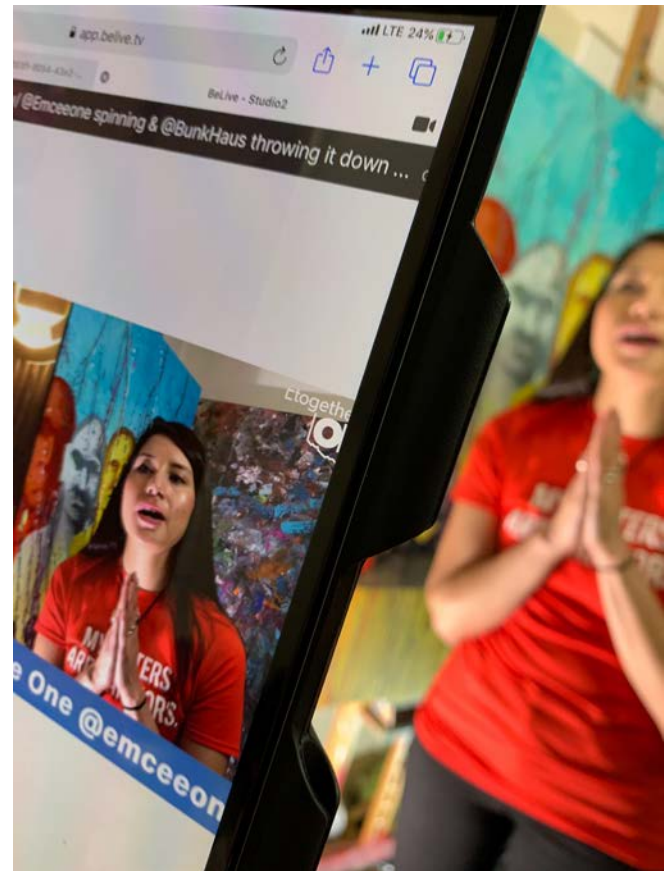
LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MEDIA

Historically, the approach of the Census Bureau has been to invest in mass market advertising and in the largest racial and ethnic groups as defined by the percentage of their population on a national level. However, migration patterns and historic events tend to cause many ethnic groups to be concentrated in relatively few states and counties. An undercount of a particular group may not be statistically significant at the national level, but could still be extremely consequential for state or local redistricting and the allocation of federal, state, and local funding to communities where members of the group are heavily concentrated.

In 2020, the Census Bureau initially tied its advertising campaigns to the 13 languages (including English) selected for on-line and telephone response. Members of the Census Bureau’s National Advisory Committee had urged advertising in more languages, as well as different tiers of language coverage for various in-language resources, an approach the Bureau did not adopt. During the extended self-response period due to the pandemic, the Census Bureau added advertising on some limited on-line platforms in an additional 41 languages for a total of 59, including English. The prime contractor covered “Diverse Mass,” advertising in English with non-ethnic mainstream media.

The Bureau did not purchase ads in Native American, Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander languages. Ads targeting these audiences were only in English, even though, according to the U.S. Office of Minority Health, over one in four American Indians and Alaska Natives speak a language other than English at home. Still, the Census Bureau placed no paid advertising in any indigenous language. As with certain immigrant communities, Indigenous speakers tend to be geographically concentrated. For example, while less than one percent of the national population, Alaska Natives are almost 16 percent of Alaska’s population. The Native American media plan should have included paid ads in indigenous languages.

This oversight created gaps in effective marketing to other communities as well. For example, because neither Hindi nor Urdu was a covered language, there were no ad buys directed to ethnic media catering to South Asian communities, even though they are one of the largest Asian American populations. Both Hindi and Urdu should have been covered, and, absent that, there should have been buys in the English-language media serving these communities, as well as investments in posters and other out-of-home marketing in the large ethnic shopping malls catering to these communities. Nor were there buys in English-language pan-Asian ethnic media. These buys should have been part of the Diverse Mass segment — if that category were truly diverse.



Instead, the Census Bureau allowed the Diverse Mass agency to limit English advertising to Asian Americans through mainstream commercials running on mainstream and digital media, rather than on media targeted to the various culturally diverse Asian American communities. Advertising for the Latinx community followed a similar pattern, with insufficient English advertising in Latinx-targeted media for English dominant speakers. For Black Americans the problem was reversed. The Census Bureau had English content in media targeting the Black community, but failed to cover immigrant languages outside of Haitian/Creole.

- Given the importance of an accurate count on the state and local levels, the Bureau should expand the number of languages covered and revise its formula to prioritize which languages will be used in paid advertising. The formula should be expanded beyond limited English proficiency at a national level and include a separate threshold for languages spoken at home in each state and county.
- Investments in ethnic media should include English language media specifically targeting ethnic communities.
- The Bureau should budget campaigns targeting communities at higher risk of being undercounted based on the cost of effectively reaching them, not on their population size.
- The Bureau should collaborate with Tribal Nations and organizations to create messaging for ads that are culturally relevant, with a context that reflects local language and dialects.

COORDINATING WITH PHILANTHROPY AND STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE ADVERTISING IMPACT

The paid advertising budgets of the Census Bureau, state and local Complete Count Committees, non-profit stakeholders, and corporate social responsibility programming, together add up to over \$750 million for the 2020 Census. Yet, there was little to no coordination of that spending among the Bureau and state and local governments, philanthropy, and nonprofit partners, resulting in a significant amount of unnecessary spending through redundant targeting and inflated bidding on digital platforms. The Census Bureau had strong partnerships with local, state, and nonprofit entities in support of field operations. A similar dynamic in paid communications would lead to significant impact in terms of greater reach and efficiency.

The Bureau's research for 2020 was far more extensive than for 2010; however, the findings were not publicly available until late Summer 2020. The delay meant that state and local governments and philanthropy had to invest in their own message testing, to guide stakeholder communications and the creation of effective educational and persuasive materials in a timely way. The Bureau's actual messaging was not unveiled until December 2019, only a month before the start of the census on January 21, 2020, in Remote Alaska. In addition, the Bureau failed to test messages that would have made it clear that there would be no citizenship question in the census. This meant that philanthropy had to fund additional messaging research to address the confusion on this issue. Unfortunately, confusion about the citizenship question lingered in many communities long after the Supreme Court put an end to the issue. Finally, the Bureau did not sufficiently share real-time feedback and results with partners as it deployed its messaging.

Very late in the planning process, the Census Bureau facilitated a meeting with the prime advertising agency that yielded some but not sufficient information for funders and key stakeholders about gaps in communications beyond language concerns. The buy information the Census Bureau released was not sufficiently detailed to be useful. When stakeholders contacted the media companies that received the buys, the companies could not provide any details. The subcontractors who focused on historically undercounted communities were not permitted to talk to stakeholders outside of structured meetings with the prime contractor. Little to no specific information was provided to philanthropy and other stakeholders about the ad content until a few hours before the content was released to

the general media and public. Even state governments like California that invested large amounts in paid media were unable to get useful information from the Census Bureau to avoid redundancy and allow the state to fill gaps rather than duplicate effort.

The first step to improving coordination must be increased transparency. The Census Bureau's stated concern was confidentiality to preserve the media buying contractor's negotiating leverage with media companies. However, that concern could be solved with the use of confidentiality agreements. Even after the census, the Bureau has not released sufficient information on its paid advertising. More details about spend numbers, audience modeling, targeting, and evaluation methods could be immensely helpful in coordinating paid communications programs in the future.

In order to evaluate the 2020 Census paid media campaign, stakeholders had to consult third party data sources after the fact. These sources often do not provide the full picture or timely information. For this report, the authors reached out to the media tracking company, AdImpact, for a summary of the Census Bureau's TV spending in 2020. It appears that the prime contractor agency, Y&R, bought time in each of the 210 individual Nielsen markets with English-language ads, as well as Spanish-language ads in 39 markets. However, without information about the local buys, stakeholders cannot assess to whom and how heavily the ads were targeted towards historically undercounted populations.

As a federal agency, the Census Bureau faces a number of constraints in purchasing ad space that particularly limits their effectiveness in reaching the historically undercounted, particularly some ethnic and immigrant communities. One of the most significant constraints is that under federal law, the Bureau can only buy from media outlets with a US tax identification number. Some influential non-English language media is foreign-owned, which made it impossible for the Census Bureau to run ads on television targeting, for example, Arabic-speaking Americans. There were also limited options for running ads on Spanish-language television and radio stations owned by Mexican companies in communities on the American side of the Mexican border. The policy also limited the media available in certain Asian languages.

In addition, federal policy requires contractors to have an independent measurement of their audiences. Many local ethnic media have limited budgets and staffing and cannot afford the audience measurement tracking required for government contracts. These local outlets, however, may be the most trusted voices in their communities. The Bureau also has RFP requirements and payment terms that make it difficult for smaller media outlets to apply and compete. Philanthropy raised these challenges with the Census Bureau early in the contracting process, suggesting it partner with stakeholders to organize a briefing targeted to smaller ethnic media operations to discuss this



reality, but the Bureau declined to do so. In California, the state government and philanthropy collaboratively funded an intermediary media organization that could make subgrants to smaller media organizations.

- The Bureau should increase transparency to enable effective coordination with philanthropy and state and local government advertising efforts and make the results of its messaging research available in January 2029, a year in advance of the start of census in remote Alaska and reserve funding for additional research to address unexpected circumstances.
- The Bureau should work with philanthropy and stakeholders to collectively devise and implement strategies to ensure that ethnic and small local media that are influential voices in the communities at most risk of being undercounted, are able to obtain funding to run effective ads.

MESSAGING RESEARCH

A number of concerns regarding the Bureau's paid communications program could be addressed with a more inclusive and diverse research process aimed at uncovering more data on historically undercounted communities, creating more engaging content, and balancing out the paid communications budget.

The Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Survey (CBAMS) is the Census Bureau's most impactful research for the paid communications program. Everything from audience profiles to content creation and media budget allocations is influenced by CBAMS. The Census Bureau was hesitant to do any messaging not sufficiently grounded in this research. Unfortunately, there were significant gaps in the research. Not all racial and ethnic groups were profiled, and many population groups at risk of not being counted well – such as parents of young children, Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities, undocumented immigrants, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities and lower-income people – were not addressed well or at all in the profiles. The Bureau relied on its primary advertising contractor, Y&R, to conduct the research. It was difficult to analyze the message testing process without more transparency on Y&R's platforms, and its process for building these audience profiles required more scrutiny.

Some of the profiles seemed to reinforce stereotypes while ignoring factors that have historically made it more difficult to accurately count these communities. For example, the profile of Asian Americans characterized them as early adopters of technology and mostly Christian. However, this description does not recognize the many differences among subgroups within the community. Similarly, stakeholders expressed significant concerns with the focus group research, particularly for the Black population, as well as for Latinos. In addition to issues around scheduling, the CBAMS study focus groups and audiences underrepresented the diversity of the Black and Latino populations in terms of domestic geography. Only one focus group was conducted for English-dominant Latinos, even though a majority of Latinos are English-dominant or bilingual. In addition, the profiles were insufficiently intersectional, tending to address each community as a homogenous group. For instance, English-language research for Latino audiences was not thoroughly represented in the research approach. Young adult Black men, one of the most historically undercounted demographic subgroups, were not sufficiently represented in the research.



Only the government has sufficient resources to do comprehensive message testing. The Census Bureau acknowledges that there are some messages more appropriate and persuasive for trusted nongovernmental voices to convey. It is in the Bureau's interest to help community partners develop and test those messages. Philanthropy worked with stakeholders to try to fill some of the gaps nationally and locally but with very limited resources.

- The Bureau should expand its approach to messaging research to better target population groups at higher risk of being missed in the census.
- The Bureau should rely less on the proprietary research and message testing platforms of the prime contractor and build into the contract provisions for providing more transparency. This would allow the Bureau to work more closely with other stakeholders seeking to understand and augment the research.
- The Bureau should not depend so heavily on the CBAMS for building audience profiles and media plans. The Bureau should consider different sources of research and other research protocols, such as group ethnographies.
- The Bureau should expand its survey sample size and design a randomized choice of survey recipients to oversample historically undercounted population groups, including increased age and gender segmentation within race.
- The Bureau should invest in research to inform effective messages that “trusted messengers,” not just the government, could use in their own Get Out the Count campaigns.

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TARGET HOUSEHOLDS CONSIDERED AT RISK FOR UNDERCOUNTING

The Bureau learned in 2010 the value of using paid advertising and integrating with its outreach efforts, particularly to reach households at risk for undercounting. However, its approach in 2020 was too limited both in who it considered to be at risk and in its approach to targeting these households.

During the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau translated content to more non-English languages than ever before, and it should be rightly commended for that accomplishment. However, missing from the plan was culturally appropriate content for English-dominant constituents from historically undercounted populations, placed in appropriate media and venues. For instance, the segment of the Latino population that consumes media predominantly in English requires a unique outreach and education approach. The Pew Research Center's 2016 National Survey of Latinos found that the majority of young Latino adults (ages 18-35) are either English dominant (41percent) or bilingual (40 percent), while 19 percent are Spanish dominant. Among Latinos ages 36 and older, a lower share is English dominant (24 percent), with higher shares rating themselves bilingual (32 percent) and Spanish dominant (44 percent). But overall, a majority of Latinos are English speakers.

The Prime Contractor for the Bureau took an odd approach to ethnic communities. While it understood that Black communities still require targeted marketing in English and had an expert firm make buys in Black media, it failed to understand that Asian American and Hispanic households might require targeted marketing in English as well as in immigrant languages. Thus, the subcontractors were not provided a budget to make buys in English in media catering to these communities. A Spanish-only campaign will not reach or resonate with this sizable segment of the population, which requires messaging separate from the diverse Mass Track. The same applies for English-dominant Asian American constituents, English-dominant MENA constituents, and other English-dominant populations from historically undercounted communities. This led to the situation in which Asian Indians, who are the second largest and fastest growing population in the Asian American community, were not targeted. For some reason, there were no paid ads in English or in Hindi, Urdu, or any of the other relevant languages, placed in media

or in community shopping centers with small businesses targeting this community. Resonant English-language ads targeting the Asian Indian community should be an end-goal of the Census Bureau's messaging research.

Several other undercounted communities were left out of the Bureau's messaging research. The LGBTQ+ community demographics intersects with factors such as housing insecurity, low income and concerns about privacy. The Bureau did include some LGBTQ+ people in its diverse mass advertising but did not target LGBTQ+ media. Children under the age of 5 have also been increasingly undercounted. Despite this trend, the Bureau's initial research and advertising plans did not sufficiently target parents of young children. The Bureau did seek to include depictions of family throughout its advertising and some messaging, but much more targeting with specific messaging is likely needed. Philanthropy worked to fill the gap in 2020 but does not have the resources of the federal government. The Native American and Arab American communities were the most dissatisfied with the advertising investments in the Bureau's paid advertising plans targeting their communities. Discussions should begin now to develop more effective strategies.

- The Census Bureau should add English speaking Hispanic and Asian ethnic household segments as part of its paid communications program and tailor the content and placement appropriately.
- The Bureau should create paid advertising programs tailored to the LGBTQ+ community and to parents of young children; and be more deliberative when creating the Native American and Arab American programs.

HYPER LOCAL MARKET TARGETING

The consensus of stakeholders representing historically undercounted communities is that a greater investment in hyper-local media is needed to reach and persuade these households to participate. Based on the Census Media Buy Schedule from Y&R, it appears their primary approach was a heavy national campaign with traditional media, along with a significant increase in digital advertising. Just over half of the media budget was for Diverse Mass communication, while the remainder was divided among the various racial/ethnic targets.

About 28 percent of the budget was spent on national media. The Census National Advisory Committee on Integrated Partnerships and Communications Working Group (IPC) recommended, "[A]s RFPs are designed for media buys, we urge the Census Bureau to prioritize media outlets that are reaching unique users, rather than media outlets that are reaching the same users through multiple outlets. As an example, ethnic and youth media outlets may be the primary media for a set of users who would not be reached by any other media source." However, Y&R focused on national media which, by its very nature, is duplicative across audiences.

Y&R likely pursued a heavy national TV schedule because it does provide efficiency of scale — when buying many local markets, it eventually becomes cheaper to buy national media. However, this approach resulted in worrisome gaps and did not allow a shift in resources to markets that may need additional coverage. For example, in New Jersey, the Census Bureau focused on the New York and Philadelphia media markets, which do not sufficiently cover local ethnic markets. Y&R bought Spanish broadcast media only in local markets as opposed to nationally, so it did have some flexibility with that medium. In an increasingly fractured media environment, we would encourage less investment in a national TV approach and greater investment in both local and ethnic markets.

In addition, among the different media, Y&R favored television over other platforms that can better reach historically undercounted communities. Forty percent of the



2020 Census paid advertising budget went to television overall, and 24 percent was solely for national television. National has a wide reach but does not allow for message targeting to different audience segments. In contrast, less than 10 percent of the budget was designated for radio. Radio can be an effective way to reach populations that do not have access to television or smartphones, or that cannot be reached through print campaigns because of low literacy. In addition, national and local radio personalities are often trusted messengers, with a significant reach in many historically undercounted communities. Philanthropy helped fill some gaps by investing in advertising efforts targeting Black, Latino and Native American radio programs, but foundations are not positioned to support the scale of effort the Census Bureau could make.

Furthermore, approximately six percent of the advertising budget was spent on Out-Of-Home (OOH) and 6.5 percent was spent on print media. For historically undercounted communities, OOH and print media are effective and efficient methods of reaching this audience. Billboards, bus wrappers, and signs in ethnic shopping centers are examples of OOH that can effectively reach these communities.

- The Bureau should increase its investment in hyper-targeted local market advertising.
- The Census Bureau should consult with stakeholders, as well as state and local Get Out the Count campaigns that invested in their own paid media, to see what strategies and messages worked well, which subcontractors they would recommend, and how the Bureau can improve its outreach. For instance, the Complete Count programs in California and New Mexico had significantly more resources invested in their Native American outreach programs and have valuable lessons that can be shared nationally.
- The Bureau should increase investment in non-TV/digital platforms. The Census Bureau should re-examine the apportionment of the paid advertising budget and the approach taken, and include ethnic market targeting regardless of whether the audiences are supported by the language assistance programs.

AD BUYING IN ELECTION YEAR

The Integrated Partnerships and Communications Working Group identified the 2020 campaign cycle as a challenge for messaging around the census. This concern was relevant and important, given the heavy levels of spending that began early in the year. To address this issue, Y&R recommended a focus on 30 second over 15 second ads, asserting that 30 second ads could not be preempted for political ads. That claim was not necessarily accurate. There are more natural 30 second breaks than there are 15 second, which makes preemption less likely, but it is inaccurate to say 30 second ads are not preemptible. Y&R operated under this incorrect assumption as it developed the advertising plan. Instead, it should have focused on buying strategies that minimize preemption during a heated political climate, such as avoiding news dayparts or focusing on niche media outlets. Likely Voter audiences and historically undercounted groups can have very different media consumption habits, so, with the right approach, it is possible to avoid overlap in schedules.

- The Bureau's advertising plan should focus more carefully on dayparting schedules in order to reach specific demographic subgroups with targeted messages.

The Bureau should increase its investment in hyper-targeted local market advertising.



SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) PROGRAM

For the next Census, the Census Bureau should consider implementing a SMS (otherwise known as texting) program. The Bureau did not have a sufficient plan to use SMS. It did attempt to deploy texting during the pandemic but ran into various obstacles that prevented it from being able to scale up the efforts. Mobile outreach is considered the best direct response tool available when done correctly, far surpassing email in response rates. Funders recognize that Bureau tests of SMS outreach early in the 2020 Census research and testing phase did not yield promising results. However, technology and the use of SMS have evolved substantially since that time. Philanthropy and some state governments invested in several SMS programs during the 2020 Census. There are a number of positive lessons from the third-party data that was used to build out the audiences and the content of texts that should be helpful as the Bureau plans for 2030. Here are some lessons philanthropy learned from the 2020 cycle that might be helpful, both to evaluate the 2020 Census and prepare for 2030: 1) Programs that sent fewer messages over a similar period of time performed better overall; 2) messages that prompted a response and asked a question had far higher engagement rates.

For the future, transparency about the Census Bureau SMS program can lead to better coordination and results. Because SMS outreach or some version of that technology will likely be a key engagement tool moving forward, the Census Bureau should determine how best to deploy this communications tool.

- The Bureau's advertising campaign should incorporate SMS programs into the overall outreach strategy.

MISINFORMATION/DISINFORMATION

The Bureau worked closely with stakeholders who were concerned about the power of social media to spread misinformation or intentional disinformation to identify and address these threats to a successful census. The threats were not novel to 2020, but the existence of multiple internet platforms on which such information could rapidly spread required substantially more planning, monitoring, and partnership than was needed for 2010. The Bureau had a series of meetings with technology companies to ensure that it employed best practices to defend against hacking, as well as to request cooperation and seek ideas on combatting misinformation and disinformation related to the 2020 Census. The Bureau and stakeholders reached out to Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other platforms. Some of the companies held trainings for the Bureau and key stakeholders to improve understanding of how their systems worked and to discuss how policies to address misinformation and disinformation could be updated to cover census content. The Bureau worked with Google to ensure its information was search engine optimized so that official 2020 Census information would display first in Google searches. Stakeholders also helped the platforms understand what kinds of problematic content might require corporate action and how it might be flagged. Facebook updated its policies in 2019; Twitter updated its policies in April 2020. The Census Counts Campaign worked with its extensive network to coordinate efforts to push factual information and the campaign's materials to the top of search efforts. Philanthropy supported organizations with data ecosystem expertise to help monitor the Internet. The Bureau and these organizations met throughout the peak operations period (i.e. self-response; Nonresponse Follow-up) to flag and address instances of misinformation and disinformation. As a result, and to the credit of the Bureau and its philanthropic and stakeholder partners, the spread of misinformation and disinformation was generally limited.

- The Bureau should continue coordinating strategies with stakeholders and communications platforms to combat misinformation and disinformation about the census and other surveys.





PEAK CENSUS OPERATIONS

The Bureau refers to the period when the census data collection begins in remote Alaska in late January to the end of the door-knocking NonResponse-Follow Up phase of the census as “Peak Census Operations.” It includes the self-response efforts where households are asked to submit their completed questionnaires by mail, by telephone or on-line.

SELF-RESPONSE

For the first time in 2020, households were able to respond on-line and by telephone, as well as by mail using a paper questionnaire which in 2010, had been the only way to self-respond. The Bureau also provided an option to respond without using the unique ID number assigned to each address (called a non-ID response). Of the 67 percent of homes that self-responded, 79.7 percent responded on-line, 18.1 percent by mail, and 2.1 percent by telephone. Mobile Questionnaire Assistance, which involved help of Bureau Staff in community locations in areas with early low self-response, also supported the on-line response option.

INTERNET RESPONSE OPTION

The Bureau is to be commended for its ability to keep the on-line option operating without any interruption. Clearly, it is a popular response option and became even more critical once the pandemic disrupted the Bureau’s operations. Assuming that the 2030 Census will continue to offer some kind of on-line response option, and because on-line response is already an option for other surveys, the Bureau should work to improve this operational element.

Organizations working on the ground fielded many calls from people who did not receive or could not find the official Census Bureau invitations and reminders containing their household ID number. Once these prospective respondents accessed the on-line portal, it was not immediately clear that there was a non-ID response option or where to find it. Consequently, they did not complete the form on-line. While it is unknown how many people did not reach out for help and did not try again, stakeholders are concerned that it could be a significant number. Stakeholders raised this issue early and repeatedly in the self-response phase, but the Bureau said it would not be possible for the vendor to modify the portal to highlight the non-ID response option in real-time. Census partner organizations are trusted voices that will assist hesitant or non-English speaking households in completing the on-line form when requested by the respondent, yet the Bureau was reluctant to walk these partnership organizations through the on-line experience. As a result, community experts could not provide feedback about potential problems with the portal in advance of the count nor did they have sufficient information to help encourage and educate nervous households about what to expect.

- The Bureau should research the extent and reasons for noncompletion of on-line responses and improve the user interface.
- The Bureau should ensure that partners have detailed information and an early walk-through of the on-line portal.
- The Bureau should analyze non-ID response rates and reconfigure operations and the on-line portal to accommodate non-ID responses more easily.
- The Bureau should consult with community organizations that can identify the technology prevalent in low-income households and then conduct appropriate research to ensure that the on-line portal is compatible with operating systems most likely to be used by households at greater risk of undercounting.

The Bureau should analyze non-ID response rates and reconfigure operations and the on-line portal to accommodate non-ID responses more easily.

- The Bureau should seek to accommodate low literacy residents with on-line assistance that provides audio as well as printed instructions.

TELEPHONE RESPONSE OPTION

In 2010, the Bureau provided a telephone hotline solely to answer questions about the census. For 2020, the Bureau added the ability to have staff directly take the caller's responses and enter them into an on-line form. This assistance was provided in the 14 Official Languages. The telephone response option, known as Census Questionnaire Assistance (CQA), is important for those who do not have access to broadband or computers or who are more comfortable providing information by phone. There is concern that the Bureau will misinterpret the relatively low telephone response rate as signaling a preference for the internet or paper response options. The low usage is not consistent with some of the research that was done by national stakeholder organizations, including the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund about the response option preferences. In fact, there are several likely reasons for the relatively low telephone response rates, which were significantly lower than projections based on 2020 Census tests.

First, the Bureau decided not to fully advertise the phone response option and toll-free number(s) on its television and radio ads because it was concerned that the phone lines would be overwhelmed by the number of people who might call at the same time. The number was advertised only in print. There are many people in America who are illiterate in English and immigrants who are illiterate in the language of their country of origin. They are among those who would most benefit by phone calling and the least likely to see and understand advertisements in the printed media.

Second, the initial invitation to households to respond to the census invited people to respond on-line but the invitation to respond by telephone was less clear. The sentence read, "If you need help completing your 2020 Census questionnaire, please call toll-free 1-844-330-2020." This could be read by many as a hot line to answer questions but not necessarily a way to complete your form.

Third, for low-income houses who have limited mobile phone plans and no land-lines, calling could be an expensive option, particularly if there are long wait times or for larger households where the process would take some time. Although it is a toll-free number so long-distance charges did not apply, households would still be using minutes on their own plans. Stakeholders raised this issue and suggested the Bureau see if the cellular companies would provide free minutes for calls to the Census Bureau toll free numbers. While an effort was made, apparently the Bureau was unable to work out any arrangement with the phone companies. Comcast and some of the other cable and internet companies did provide either fixed or mobile hot spots for wi-fi connections to some of the stakeholder groups.

Fourth, several census partner organizations tested the CQA system to see how long the wait times were or they patched calls through to the census as they did their outreach. They reported complaints about the process from constituents they had persuaded to call. Complaints coming into hotlines coordinated by the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights Under Law, Asian Americans Advancing Justice/AAJC, Arab American Institute and the NALEO Educational Fund reported wait times of an hour or more to get through to a census taker. To help improve the telephone response



option, the Bureau added a call-back function, but in the early operation the call back was showing up on some phones as blocked or as spam. The Bureau worked with carriers to fix this problem. Then this service was temporarily suspended when phone lines were overwhelmed. There is no public information as to how well that function was used.

There was a significant failure of the telephone operations early in the self-response period, which the Bureau has rarely acknowledged publicly. When the Bureau first implemented changes at the call centers due to the pandemic protocols which limited the number of employees who could work at one time, untenable wait times on the phone lines developed. Without warning, the Bureau then took down the call-back option which was meant to ease wait times and even out the flow. The long wait times and the interruption to the call back function were particularly acute for the non-English lines. Callers were given no notice of the wait times and the Bureau was slow to publicly acknowledge the problems. The Bureau did not sufficiently ensure that the public and stakeholders understood the temporary nature of the staffing difficulties and resulting wait times, nor did it provide convincing public assurances that it had addressed the problems and improved telephone response experience was now available. In fact, the Bureau provided almost no transparency about the long wait times.

Fifth, the initial recorded CQA message callers heard was confusing because it first emphasized the internet response option as an alternative and did not clearly inform callers that they could, indeed, complete their forms by telephone. The opening message continued for 40 seconds before callers heard a menu for further assistance. While the opening message played, callers were continually directed to the on-line response portal and were instructed to locate the household ID on their census packet. As a consequence, some callers were left with the impression that they could not give their responses by phone or could not do so unless they had their unique household ID. Even when callers reached a live operator they were still told about the on-line option. The entire approach led some people who intended to respond, to hang up without completing the form. Many callers complained to community-based outreach organizations and to the census hot-lines operated by key national organizations. Stakeholders repeatedly made the Bureau aware of these concerns, but the Bureau declined to modify its approach and messaging. It appeared that the Bureau was seeking to encourage people to hang up and respond on-line. They did not seem to understand that calling about the census was not like calling business that had a product to sell or, that the callers may not have the ability to go on-line. It is unclear how well CQA was tested and evaluated in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. The apparent effort to push households to self-respond on-line rather than by telephone may have backfired by causing households not to self-respond at all. The Bureau should assume that callers want to respond by phone and should do more to keep them on the line to complete the process. The less-than-robust approach to prospective phone respondents also made it more difficult for census partners engaged in Get Out the Count efforts to recommend the telephone response option to their constituents. They knew that many callers who encountered long wait times and confusing messages would hang up and never call again.

Because the Bureau did not seem to address the issues, many organizations working directly to encourage phone participation received complaints and, ultimately, lost confidence in the phone system. These partner groups were concerned that their outreach audiences, many of whom were likely less eager to participate, would not be able or willing to wait for an unreasonably long period of time to talk to a CQA representative. Community organizers and service agencies believed they had only one shot to convince hesitant or busy households to self-respond and did not want to waste that opportunity recommending an on-line response option that might difficult or uninviting. Also, it is not clear how closely the Census Bureau monitored the work of telephone operators, or what kind of ongoing training the operators received.



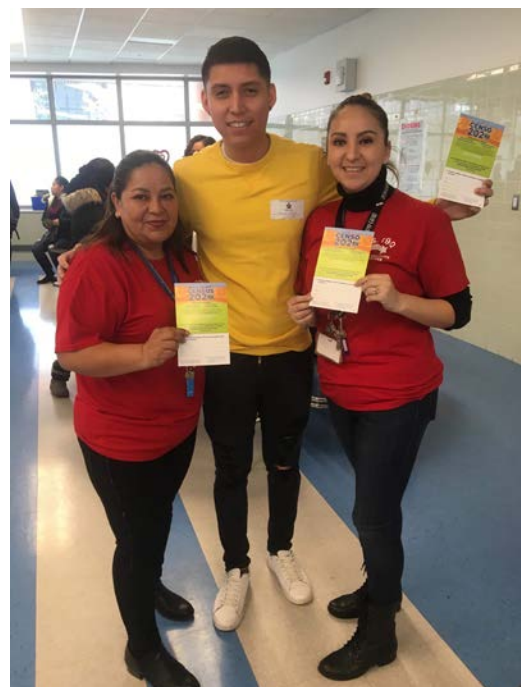
Stakeholder reports suggested that CQA operators sometimes communicated inconsistent information. It is likely that early challenges to easy phone responses coupled with the Bureau's lack of transparency, discouraged wider use of the telephone option. The Bureau also declined to provide weekly information about wait times, disconnects, and other metrics that might have helped stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of the telephone operation. The lack of transparency led directly to a lack of trust in the CQA operation.

- The Bureau should advertise the telephone option on radio and television to reach people who have low literacy, which some advocates estimate to be as high as 15 percent of the population.
- The mailed invitations to participate in the census should make it clearer that a household can respond via the telephone.
- The Bureau should improve the telephone response option experience. The introductory message callers hear first should immediately make clear that the caller can complete the form with the assistance of an operator and that the household ID number is not required to do so.
- The Bureau should ensure sufficient CQA capacity and reasonable wait times, which would then allow it to advertise the availability of telephone response option more fully.
- The Bureau should urge cellular service companies to provide free minutes covering calls made to the Census telephone response lines.
- The Bureau should improve training for CQA operators and monitor their performance in real time.

MAIL RESPONSE OPTION

The 2020 Census operational plan included an initial mailing of census packets, called the “Internet First” package, to about 80 percent of homes nationwide. In targeted communities, the packets were bilingual in English and Spanish. The packets invited households to respond on-line and invited them to call a toll-free number if they needed assistance. The remaining homes in the mail-out universe received the same materials plus a paper questionnaire included in the first mailing. The second and third mailings were reminder postcards, urging self-response while the third mailing was sent only to nonresponding addresses. A fourth mailing, sent to addresses from which a response was still lacking, included a paper questionnaire. Because of the pandemic, the self-response timeline was extended several months, allowing time for an additional reminder postcard. By mid-summer, a final new mailing was sent to low self-response neighborhoods that included a paper form in addition to information about responding on-line and by phone. Households that needed materials in languages other than Spanish or English were not able to get an official paper form. Instead, unofficial translated sample forms with video explanations were available on-line to compare to the official English paper form. It is unclear how many households were aware that the sample forms were available unless they heard about them from nonprofit or government agency outreach as the Bureau did not advertise them.

The Bureau also subsequently mailed paper forms to households who did not respond to the initial postcard mailing, inviting households to respond on-line or to call a toll -free number if they needed assistance. Based on City University of New York's (CUNY) Center for Urban Research, early evaluations of self-response, (<https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-1> and <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-7>), it appears that households in many historically undercounted communities clearly preferred to respond using the paper form. In rural and Tribal areas where broadband access is limited at best, paper forms were typically preferred. The Census Bureau should



evaluate this pattern through research, to determine if it is likely to persist through the 2030 Census. While paper forms are more costly overall than on-line responses, they can be a cost-effective investment compared to the cost of sending an enumerator to the door, if more households self-respond using this method which generates more accurate and complete data.

It is unrealistic to expect that all households failing to respond quickly after receiving their census packets would have saved or even received the materials. This applies even to subsequent mailings containing paper forms sent to nonresponding “Internet First” households. Some households, particularly those who do not speak English, mistake the materials for junk mail and discard them. In one Chinatown apartment building in San Francisco, unopened census mailings for most of the households were seen tossed in the garbage by the mail boxes. The pandemic made the problem of delayed self-response more acute because it forced an extension of all data collection operations, leading to confusion over when the census would end. The Census Bureau wisely add an additional mailing to low-response census tracts in August that included a paper form, although households in Update/Leave areas were not eligible for that mailing.

One of the major problems for Census 2020 was that even after the courts held against the Administration’s last-minute attempt to add a citizenship question, a significant number of people continued to believe such a question was on the form. In fact, in the Summer of 2019, the Bureau conducted a 500,000-household test of the effect of a citizenship question on self-response rates. Many experts believed the test design and findings were neither robust nor useful and in fact served only to cause greater confusion. In addition to creating fear in households, the belief that the question remained on the form also caused social media influencers, businesses, and institutions to hesitate to help with outreach. The unsuccessful effort to add a citizenship question to the form delayed the printing of paper questionnaires. The official form was helpful to allay fears about the questionnaire in general and help lead people through each question and educate them about other things that should not be on the form such as social security numbers so they could avoid scams. Some of the questions were confusing even to native born Americans.

- The Bureau should continue to make paper forms available to households in 2030 and should consider increasing the number of paper forms made available to each household. The Bureau should make available, by mail or by in-person drop-off, at least two paper questionnaires to households that do not self-respond on-line or by phone in a timely way based on careful testing of optimal timing.
- The Bureau should make paper forms available not just through census packets delivered to households, but also through a program that builds on the concept of “Be Counted” forms available at selected community locations in 2010. Also, the Bureau should test a system, with sufficient safeguards, to allow households and others to download an official form via the internet. Adding forms that can be distributed via the internet or



through community partners would enable the Census Bureau to provide official bilingual forms in additional languages beyond Spanish and make the Spanish forms more widely available.

- As far in advance of the census as possible, the Bureau should share prototypes of paper questionnaires with partner organizations in order to inform volunteer training and community outreach activities. Forms testing questions that will likely heighten confusion and fear should not be tested during the actual census.

MOBILE QUESTIONNAIRE ASSISTANCE (MQA) OPTION

Over the decades, stakeholders have consistently urged the Bureau to include some form of questionnaire assistance centers in the census operational plan to address its concern about confidentiality protections when community advocates offer direct assistance to households filling out census forms. The need for direct assistance is acute, as demonstrated by stakeholder-run census hotlines and the outreach done by community-based organizations. Many concepts in the questionnaire are confusing or unclear to the average person. For example, who should respond in multi-family homes or homes where residents are not related to each other? How should people answer the race and ethnicity questions which can be difficult to understand? Historically, the Bureau has resisted using these programs, and has discouraged non-Bureau community volunteers from providing direct assistance, the most effective way to encourage historically undercounted households to participate. Because of the Bureau's reluctance, planning for community programs each decade has occurred late in the cycle and has not been sufficiently transparent to allow for helpful stakeholder input. The 2010 Census plan included Questionnaire Assistance Centers located at community centers and other institutions, but the program was not well implemented by the Bureau and, as a result, not well advertised or adequately staffed.

The original 2020 Census plan did not include a questionnaire assistance program. However, as the result of stakeholder advocacy, Congress required the Census Bureau to establish such a program. The Bureau developed a plan for mobile assistance, with deployment based on neighborhoods or areas with low self-response rates. MQA staff were to spend time at highly-trafficked locations such as public transit and government centers, local festivals, libraries, and sporting events. Unfortunately, the Bureau's late national planning made it difficult for stakeholder groups to suggest effective placement of MQA staff. It also made it hard to educate local partners about how best to leverage the assistance to boost census participation. When the pandemic all but eliminated large gatherings and closed most government buildings and libraries, the Bureau adjusted the MQA plan to include grocery stores, pharmacies, food pantries, and other venues that attracted some pedestrian traffic, but, in many areas, the pandemic stay-at-home orders delayed or prevented deployment of MQA. Fortunately, where MQA was deployed effectively, it was viewed as extremely helpful. In New Jersey, for example, community partners were invited to propose locations that matched their needs, and partnership specialists designed MQA events that were flexible and fit those needs.

However, MQA staffing in 2020 was somewhat problematic. Rather than using partnership specialists who were more well-versed in census operations and better able to respond to questions and concerns from historically undercounted populations, the Bureau largely reassigned former recruitment assistants to staff MQA events. In some locations, for example, MQA staff did not proactively promote the service they were providing or offer to assist individuals in completing the census form.

- The Bureau should expand and strengthen programs like Mobile Questionnaire Assistance placing Census Bureau staff at community and government centers to provide direct assistance to people willing to self-respond. The Bureau should incorporate a questionnaire assistance operation in the 2030 Census plan, with

The Bureau should expand and strengthen programs like Mobile Questionnaire Assistance placing Census Bureau staff at community and government centers to provide direct assistance to people willing to self-respond.

earlier planning and greater transparency about the criteria and process for deciding where to locate mobile or even fixed assistance activities.

- The Bureau should provide stakeholders and MQA staff with clearer expectations as to their roles and duties, and ensure stronger supervision of MQA activities.

ENUMERATING RURAL AREAS

In 2020, as the Bureau increasingly relied on technology and broadband access, rural and remote areas were at a greater risk of being undercounted. Indigenous and migrant worker language needs and high levels of distrust of the federal government created additional barriers. Concentrations of seasonal vacation homes in some sparsely populated areas also complicated enumeration efforts. The Bureau's 2020 Census Operational Plan did not sufficiently address the range of challenges unique to rural and indigenous areas (including Pacific Islander communities in Hawaii) and broadband deserts, thus jeopardizing a fair and accurate count in these communities and populations. Partner organizations in several rural areas complained that the Census Bureau had assigned staff from more urban areas who were not familiar with local geography and culture. Furthermore, since in 2020 Area Census Offices across the country were spread thin compared to the number of local offices in 2010, the Bureau was not able to maintain adequate engagement during peak operations. This resulted in an insufficient number of official Census 2020 staff at local events in some states and an inadequate supply of relevant and effective census materials for rural events.

Due to the cross-cutting nature of many issues affecting the successful enumeration of rural and sparsely-populated areas, these issues and related recommendations appear throughout this report.

UPDATE/LEAVE OPERATIONS

As in the past, a major element of the 2020 Census plan was to mail census materials only to city-style residential addresses. Most households in rural areas without city-style addresses or mail delivery to housing units are instead covered by a process known as Update/Leave. This means census workers are supposed to update the Bureau's address list while they leave a census packet that includes a paper form. When the pandemic severely delayed the Update/Leave operation, in some rural communities the Bureau added a targeted postcard mailing to P.O. Boxes. This postcard alerted residents about the upcoming hand-delivery of their census packets and the fact that the packets would include paper questionnaires and instructions for responding on-line and by phone. However, the general practice of not mailing census materials to households using P.O. Boxes, whether by choice or necessity, has likely outlived any previous rationale. Residents of remote and rural communities are not the only ones disadvantaged by this policy. A study by the San Joaquin Valley Census Research Project found that in the southern half of California's Central Valley region, 13 percent of low-income immigrants living in unpermitted, low-visibility housing used P.O. Boxes even in communities with city-style addressing. (*Edward Kissam, Richard Mines, Cindy Quezada, Jo Ann Intili, and Gail Wadsworth, "San Joaquin Valley Latino Immigrants: Implications of Survey Findings for Census 2020"* <https://www.shfcenter.org/San-Joaquin-Valley-Census-Research-Project>.) The inability of many households to receive census forms and reminders through the mail likely contributes to lower self-response rates in Native American and rural communities.

In March 2020, shortly after the start of peak census operations, the pandemic interrupted and seriously delayed completion of the Update/Leave operation. This caused severe problems in rural areas, including Indian reservations, the outer



islands of Hawaii and all of Puerto Rico whose infrastructure was still recovering from the 2017 Hurricane Maria as well as a series of massive 2019 earthquakes. As a result, households in these areas did not receive their census packets in a timely way, thus reducing their ability to self-respond. In many areas, there was confusion about whether households should try to respond on-line or by telephone even though they did not have their unique census identifiers. The Bureau's official policy was to discourage households in the Update/Leave universe from responding on-line or by telephone if they had not received packets with a unique household ID. The Bureau told these households to wait until the packets with the IDs could be delivered, but, in some areas, partners on the ground were given conflicting advice. One way to facilitate non-ID response in Update/Leave areas would be to improve the on-line portal or telephone response process for accepting descriptive-style addresses.

The significant delay in completing the Update/Leave process also seriously disrupted and ultimately undermined, federal, state, local, and community-based advertising and outreach campaigns designed to promote awareness that census materials were being delivered. In Alaska, the community's paid advertising had already begun even as the Update/Leave operations were interrupted. The Bureau gave very short notice to communities when Update/Leave was restarted (or, in some cases, started on a delayed basis) and did not run paid advertising to alert households. Further, COVID concerns kept census workers from knocking on doors to verify address information when they dropped off the packets, leaving many households unaware of the operation. Community-based groups and Complete Count Committee volunteers reported seeing census materials ignored and left outside to be scattered by the wind and rain. During the Update/Leave Operation, census workers delivered packets to vacant vacation homes, raising local concerns that these homes would be vulnerable to potential thieves looking for evidence of unoccupied residences.

The wildfires, pandemic, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters that happened before and during Census 2020 further exposed the vulnerability of the way the Bureau has historically counted rural areas. This requires a major overhaul of operations.

- The Bureau should consult with rural community leaders and Tribal governments, to assess and redesign its approach to counting and conducting surveys that include rural areas.
- The Bureau should reverse its blanket policy of not mailing census packets to P.O. Boxes, particularly in rural areas.
- The Bureau should conduct field tests and qualitative research to improve methods for sending information (including survey materials) to households lacking city-style mailing addresses (such as Highway Contract Route, Rural Route addresses, Post Office Boxes, and households that may only be located through GPS coordinates or geographic descriptions), especially those located on American Indian reservations and Tribal lands and in Alaska Native villages.
- The Bureau should ensure sufficient local hiring of field staff and enumerators familiar with the area they are working in and should train field staff how to locate the addresses in their caseloads using GPS coordinates on their Bureau-issued smartphones.
- The Bureau should examine the degree to which the reduced number of local census offices impacted its ability to provide quality support to rural and remote areas and Tribal lands and its ability to establish a visible presence to residents of these communities through local media.
- The Bureau should rethink procedures for identifying and resolving the status of vacation homes in rural areas.

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OPERATIONAL PLANNING FOR RURAL NATIVE AMERICAN, ALASKA NATIVE AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AREAS

The Census Bureau must overcome substantial distrust of the federal government among American Indians, developed over centuries of broken treaties and promises. Native Americans living on reservations had among the highest undercounts in the 2010 census. Alaska Natives in Alaska and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the more rural areas of Hawaii were also likely undercounted in 2010. In 2020, the Bureau faced significant additional challenges in conducting door-to-door activities on reservations which were closed due to the pandemic. This included delivering census materials in the Update/Leave Operation and interviewing unresponsive households in the Nonresponse Follow-up Operation. This has a particular impact on the count of indigenous peoples, particularly those in rural areas. The Bureau failed to sufficiently hire enumerators living on reservations or negotiate agreements covering the sharing of Tribal government records. During the pandemic, the Bureau was able to negotiate access to phone lists with some, though not all, Navajo Nation communities that had closed their borders to outsiders during the pandemic. This arrangement could serve as a preliminary model for more extensive data sharing for the 2030 Census.

Given the likely expanded use of administrative records to enumerate the population in 2030, the Bureau must explore the possibility of negotiating agreements with each Tribe for access to administrative databases created and maintained by their respective governments, an endeavor that will require a substantial period of time.

- The Bureau should improve operational planning for rural and remote Tribal areas.
- The Bureau should reevaluate and improve operations to enumerate rural and remote areas, American Indian reservations, and Tribal lands to ensure adequate hiring of census workers in these areas with appropriate language and cultural knowledge. It should also develop more effective contingency plans to ensure robust operations when unanticipated natural or public health disasters disrupt the census.
- Given the sovereign nation status of American Indian Tribes and the hurdles that must be overcome, the Bureau should begin now to develop a joint comprehensive census plan with each Tribe for the 2030 Census, including appropriate additional protections around any agreement to share Tribal administrative records.

The Bureau should improve operational planning for rural and remote Tribal areas.

ENUMERATOR HIRING, TRAINING, AND DEPLOYMENT

The Bureau is to be applauded for its efforts to complete hiring, training, and deployment of hundreds of thousands of census workers under incredible pressures and circumstances. At the height of the enumeration, the Bureau's workforce constitutes one of the nation's largest government operations, second only to the military. The Bureau faced several challenges in hiring and retaining sufficient staff for the 2020 Census. In 2019 and early 2020, before the pandemic, unemployment was relatively low, raising concerns about the Bureau's ability to recruit enough workers. Once the pandemic upended community life and the economy, the Bureau had to shift almost completely to virtual training and shorten its in-person onboarding procedures. In addition, the Bureau had to resume recruitment efforts while the census was ongoing, as approximately a third of its recruited workforce dropped out because of COVID fears.

Some census stakeholders who had been helping recruit workers suspended their efforts out of concerns that the Bureau's health and safety protocols were insufficient to protect field and local office staff as well as the households they would be visiting. Some groups even considered actively discouraging members of their communities from working as enumerators. The Bureau initially did not require employees to wear a mask unless it was locally required and did not permit enumerators to suggest that people wear a mask while being interviewed. The Bureau relied on social distancing to keep its employees safe. Many organizers, however, felt that the minimal protocols

put enumerators and communities at risk, particularly in apartment buildings where social distancing during at-the-door interviews could be difficult. There was also controversy over the Bureau's initial paid advertising for the Nonresponse Follow-up phase, which did not show enumerators or the people being interviewed wearing masks. The pandemic caused an extended employment period with uncertain start time for Nonresponse Follow-up which was phased in across the country as states, cities and towns re-opened. The Bureau had to deploy its workforce while working around and keeping them safe during wildfires, hurricanes, civil unrest and pandemic flare-ups. The prior Administration's rush to complete the field work forced the Bureau to pay unplanned bonuses and ask enumerators to work overtime.

The Census Bureau sought to simplify the hiring processes compared to 2010, which had required a series of tests. This prompted some community partners to invest significant funds in training for potential applicants. However, many community organizations reported that the 2020 Census on-line job portal was difficult to navigate. While theoretically, applicants without access to a computer or broadband should have been able to complete the application on their smartphones, one partner organization representing cities determined that it was difficult to complete the process that way. Libraries and colleges offering access to computers and the internet had to shut down during the pandemic, and approved fingerprinting centers also became unavailable. This particularly undermined the hiring of staff to work in rural areas. Staff from other areas were brought in to do the work but they did not know local geography or cultures.

The digital divide created a barrier to robust hiring in communities lacking reliable broadband. The Bureau's decision to move the entire application process on-line made it difficult for residents in areas with low internet connectivity and computer access to pursue census jobs. In at least one region, the Regional Director acquired vans outfitted with wi-fi hotspots to enable community partners to hold hiring events at libraries and colleges. However, that initiative did not become a national program. With no formal plan to address the digital divide in rural and certain urban communities, partners raised concerns that the Bureau would not be able to hire partnership specialists and enumerators familiar with the geography, cultures, and communities in those areas. Unfortunately, that seemed to be the case in some areas. Stakeholder organizations and funders received some reports that field staff got lost while hand-delivering census packets in rural Update/Leave areas or when they tried to enumerate nonresponding households in the door-knocking phase. In a few reported instances, Update/Leave staff who could not locate all their assigned homes resorted to giving the census packets to local residents to deliver.

The Bureau reports that 20 percent of its over 523,000 field employees were bilingual and spoke over 400 languages and dialects. Even so, it is unclear whether there was targeted outreach in every region to ensure a sufficient number of bilingual workers in the languages needed. There was also no formal verification of the level of bilingual abilities self-described by applicants.

In addition, there was insufficient communication among the Bureau, state officials, and stakeholders about the process by which states could adopt waivers for census-related income when establishing or maintaining eligibility for various assistance programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Common Cause researched and tracked the process in each state and the District of Columbia, providing guidance to stakeholder groups working to ensure that appropriate waivers were in place. Funders and stakeholders, rather than the Census Bureau, were



sometimes the primary sources of information about state income waivers for community organizations engaged in recruitment.

Partner organizations supporting the census in rural areas reported that some applicants had difficulty getting to a certified fingerprinting center for the background check. When American Indian reservations closed their borders due to the pandemic, the Bureau declined to accept fingerprint certification for residents who had been fingerprinted for other purposes, such as casino jobs. In remote Alaska, the Alaska Federation of Natives worked with village officials to recruit and help people navigate the application process. These challenges became even more acute during the pandemic, when fingerprinting centers were closed and stay-at-home orders were put in place, or in the case of hard-hit reservations, borders were closed.

The switch to on-line training also led to some gaps. Experienced enumerators reported there was little time for training about how to convince reluctant households to open their doors and answer all questions. In past years, in-person training included real-life examples of the enumeration process and an opportunity for role-playing, giving new enumerators a better understanding of what to expect and how to effectively persuade households to fully participate. Some enumerators believed the time allotted for training was insufficient, given the need to review COVID protocols and new technology. This was a greater challenge for less-technology-savvy hires. Enumerators reported that they were given only one week to respond to a survey about their work experience. Those who have compared notes reported wide variations in their training. They also noted differences between written descriptions of their training and the training they actually received. Enumerators also reported difficulty securing answers to questions about situations they encountered in the field. For example, one enumerator described being unable to determine how to enumerate residents of *airbnb* housing units. As a result, crew members ended up determining their own rules for these cases.

Finally, the Census Bureau faced unusual challenges related to the deployment of field staff. In previous census years, the Bureau had been able to rely on workers hired locally. In 2020, the Bureau needed to assign many enumerators to communities and even states in which they did not live. Community partners and other stakeholders reported instances of enumerators getting lost in unfamiliar territory, particularly in areas where GIS did not function well.; Urban workers sent to rural areas often were unfamiliar with local cultures. There were even reports of workers giving up before completing their caseloads. There were also reports of enumerators from suburban communities being assigned to unfamiliar inner-city neighborhoods, leading some to mark housing as unsafe without attempting in-person interviews.

The previous Administration decided in early August 2020, during Nonresponse Follow-up, to abruptly curtail the previously-announced extended time period for finishing the door-knocking operation. This change prompted a lawsuit by the National Urban League along with numerous county, city, and Tribal co-plaintiffs. The lawsuit itself added to the uncertainty about the timeline for completing the work. In addition to the pandemic, the Bureau had to contend with wildfires in Western states, hurricanes and



tornados, particularly in the South, and a rescheduled count of people experiencing homelessness. As a result, the Bureau had to encourage enumerators and other field staff to work overtime. The Bureau also assigned over 25,000 enumerators to work outside of their home communities and states to complete the nonresponse Follow-up workload in areas without sufficient numbers of local workers.

- The Bureau should improve the recruitment, employment, training, and deployment of enumerators.
- Unless the digital divide is eliminated before the next census, the Bureau should make paper job applications available in areas without reliable broadband access or with low computer usage. The Bureau should provide print materials in addition to on-line access so that partner organizations can print and distribute materials. The Bureau also should develop partnerships with libraries, schools, farm bureaus, and other institutions that can provide computers, kiosks, or other forms of access to job applications. Ensuring access to applications in all communities will help ensure that all interested candidates, regardless of their access to computers or broadband, have equal access to census employment opportunities. This modest change in procedures will also help the Census Bureau hire candidates who best know the culture and geography of their communities.
- Due to a litigation settlement agreement following the 2010 Census, the Bureau changed its hiring protocols to preclude an automatic bar on applicants with prior nonviolent criminal offenses. It is important for the Bureau to prevent discrimination against applicants with prior records that are not relevant to their ability to carry out their work and that do not pose a threat to the safety of communities in which they work.
- The Bureau's hiring process should accommodate alternative documentation of fingerprinting, particularly in areas where public transportation is limited and acceptable fingerprinting services are not easily accessible or widely available.
- The Bureau should track, by language, the hiring of bilingual workers as partnership specialists, enumerators, and mobile assistance staff. The agency should make that information periodically available to census stakeholders working to help the Bureau recruit culturally and linguistically skilled workers. The Bureau should assess how well-matched the bilingual staff were to the communities in which they worked in 2020.
- The Administration should propose and Congress should pass a permanent waiver to allow work-authorized noncitizens to be employed as partnership specialists, mobile questionnaire assistance staff, and enumerators in the decennial census.
- The Bureau should establish an early and more formal process to ensure that states adopt waivers allowing recipients of certain government benefits to work as enumerators without losing or jeopardizing their eligibility for benefits. The Bureau also should explore securing permanent state waivers for temporary part-time employment during a decennial census.
- The Bureau should conduct an extensive assessment of its training materials and protocols, the extent to which field staff correctly followed procedures, and the availability of ongoing support in the field.
- Enumerators from nonrural areas assigned to rural areas must have automobiles appropriate to navigating in those communities, as well as additional training on cultural norms and navigation challenges in the event the Bureau's GPS system fails to work well in low-internet areas.

The Bureau should improve the recruitment, employment, training, and deployment of enumerators.

NONRESPONSE FOLLOW-UP OPERATION (NRFU) (DOOR-TO-DOOR ENUMERATION)

Nonresponse Follow-Up is the final phase of the field collection of responses from households. This is a massive operation involving the hiring and deployment of about 500,000 temporary, largely part time census takers, known as enumerators, who visit households in-person to persuade and assist those who did not voluntarily self-respond either by mail, on-line, by phone, or with help from at a mobile census assistance worker. Staff were equipped with mobile devices which were monitored by supervisors who could assess how efficiently the work was being done. Supervisors sent messages with daily routing and updates on operations instructions. Staff wore an ID badge and carried a Census Bureau bag and notebook but otherwise did not have a uniform. They were issued hand sanitizer and a couple of cloth masks they were expected to clean.

While the Bureau did run some paid advertising about the door-to-door phase of the census, the scope of public education may not have been sufficient, and more can be done to improve the process. Some enumerators reported that their badges and official census bags were inadequate to instill trust that they were official Census Bureau employees. The Bureau told concerned stakeholders that it did not issue any sort of “uniform” for field staff because of the ease with which potential criminals could copy the apparel — a concern that presumably also applied to criminal duplication of the official government badge and bag. Some nonresponding households, or neighbors who were asked to provide information as a proxy, believed that enumerators were actually scam artists. Therefore, the Bureau must explore additional ways to boost the credibility of enumerators in the field.

The Bureau conducts little formal outreach to educate apartment and other housing managers and building owners about their legal obligations under Title 13, U.S.C., to allow and facilitate enumerators access to their properties. This lack of education was exacerbated in 2020 by the pandemic lock down. All enumerators should have an official letter to present to building managers and concierges, clearly stating the statutory requirements. The Bureau should institute a more effective outreach plan in partnership with local officials, chambers of commerce and associations and publications that can educate landlords and building managers about the enumeration of multi-unit buildings and multi-family housing.

The abrupt ending of the operation was chaotic and confusing to workers and stakeholders alike. There were news reports in which census takers complained that they pressured to cut corners to allow the Bureau to close cases and shut down the operation in order to meet the prior Administration’s changing deadlines, even as census stakeholders concerned about serious undercounts, especially of the historically undercounted, challenged those deadlines in court.

- The Bureau should improve NRFU operations and help prepare partner organizations, civic leaders, and the public about what to expect and how to cooperate with enumerators.
- The Bureau should consider issuing one or more articles of apparel to enumerators, to help the public identify official staff.
- The Census Bureau should provide owners, managers, and landlords of apartment buildings, other multi-family housing, and gated communities with clear, direct, and frequent information about their legal obligation to guarantee entry for enumerators seeking to visit households on their property. Census Bureau notifications should prepare managers and landlords to allow enumerators into gated communities and to provide information about the occupants of a housing unit, as a proxy, if asked. The 2020 Census materials did not make the obligation to ensure property access clear.

The Bureau should improve NRFU operations and help prepare partner organizations, civic leaders, and the public about what to expect and how to cooperate with enumerators.

- Advertising during the door-to-door follow-up operation should alert households to the possibility of more than one visit or an in-person visit even to self-responding households. There also should be some public education about the possibility of being asked to provide proxy information for a neighbor.

SPECIAL ENUMERATION OPERATIONS

GROUP QUARTERS

The Bureau has special operations to count institutions that are not single-family households and apartments, such as college dormitories, juvenile detention centers, immigrant detention centers and prisons. The timing of the pandemic could not have been worse for the count of college students living away from home during the academic year. There was massive confusion about whether students should be counted at their parents' homes, where many lived after campus shutdowns, or at their college-based addresses. The Census Bureau was slow to issue clear guidance to the public on the correct way to count college students who had been displaced from their college-based April 1st residences. Once the Bureau did issue guidance, the information was not clear, resulting in confusion among partnership specialists, some of whom continued to advise stakeholders and households that college students should be counted at their parents' homes. The Group Quarters Operation already allowed and even encouraged higher education institutions to electronically transfer data to the Bureau about students living in university-run housing. Once most students had left their campuses, the Bureau redoubled its efforts to obtain administrative data for students who would have been living in their dormitories, as well as those who had lived in off-campus housing. However, many institutions provided only minimal data about each student, citing federal privacy law requirements that students opt-in to broader data sharing, including information about gender, age, and race. This was a problem the Bureau would have encountered even without the pandemic. Addressing this issue involves many stakeholders including Congress, higher education institutions, the U.S. Department of Education, and local officials in so-called "college towns," to ensure appropriate access to administrative records so that this student population can be enumerated more effectively and thoroughly.

The Bureau conducts a post-enumeration survey (PES) after each census which is designed to evaluate the coverage of housing units and people living in those units, but the PES does not cover the accuracy and quality of the enumeration of the Group Quarters population. This survey is critical because it is used to estimate undercounts and overcounts by race, ethnicity, age, and other characteristics and by state. This is how we can determine how reliable the data is for different uses and how we understand where efforts need to be targeted to prevent future undercounts. However, the sample sizes are limited and the PES does not include every kind of residence. For example, it does not cover Group Quarters which include college dorms, juvenile detention centers and prisons, and other such institutions. College dorms are extremely important in college towns and communities. The issue of prisons is discussed in an earlier section covering residence rules.

- The Bureau should research methodologies for measuring coverage of the Group Quarters population in the decennial census. The Bureau should research whether the PES or another methodology is appropriate to measure census coverage of the Group Quarters population, and then adopt an appropriate method for the 2030 Census.
- The Bureau should work with Congress and relevant stakeholders to facilitate the use of administrative records to enumerate college students living in Group Quarters and to ensure that students living in off-campus housing are counted accurately.

SERVICE-BASED ENUMERATION (SBE) AND TARGETED NON-SHELTERED OUTDOOR LOCATIONS (TNSOL) OPERATIONS

Service-based Enumeration and Targeted Non-Sheltered Outdoor Locations Operations are the basic way the Bureau counts people who do not live in what are considered to be standard housing or are considered to be without a home on the April 1 Census reference day. Even under the best of conditions, the enumeration of people experiencing homelessness who live in sheltered facilities or outdoor locations is problematic and difficult. In 2020, however, those challenges were magnified, as the pandemic disrupted the timing of the operation (technically part of the larger Group Quarters Operation, and originally scheduled for March 30–April 1), a crucial element of the plan which is based largely on how weather impacts where homeless people find shelter and when they are most likely to seek benefits.

For decades, stakeholders have urged the Census Bureau to consider supplementing or supplanting the enumeration of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness with data from the HUD-required, but locally conducted, Point-in-Time (PIT) counts, conducted annually on a single night in January (or biennially for the unsheltered population). Replacing the census operation with PIT or other administrative data could be problematic, given the April 1st reference date for the census, as well as the inconsistent quality and content of the data from place to place. However, there could be greater coordination with state and local governments and service-providers, as well as the use of various administrative databases, including Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) records. For example, in 2020, in lieu of in-person enumerator visits, and given continued COVID concerns, the Bureau entered into an agreement with New York City to obtain records on individuals accessing homeless shelters.

When the pandemic disrupted its planned operations, the Bureau wisely consulted with experts, service providers, and community advocates to determine new dates for the SBE and TNSOL operations, as it considered the best option for replicating conditions that the original dates offered. The Bureau decided on September 22–24. After completion, however, partner organizations heard reports that the operation was rushed, possibly due to the Administration's effort to end Nonresponse Follow-up on September 30, later changed to October 15 under federal court order in the *National Urban League* case. Reportedly, in Los Angeles, enumerators were asked to volunteer for shifts on short notice and, in some locations, may have done only a visual count from their cars. In Yakima, Washington, community organizers reported that the count was done during hours when homeless people were not present.

Other challenges included continued pandemic-related social-distancing and mask protocols, overburdened shelter staff, and weather events — such as hurricanes and wild fires — more likely to occur at that time of year than in the Spring. Consequently, service providers sought more thorough advance contact (which had to be repeated due to the delayed operation) and better coordination with the Bureau.

- The Bureau should consult with service providers, advocates, and state, local, and Tribal governments, about ways to improve the process for counting people experiencing homelessness, including the use of administrative records and databases some localities maintain to help serve this vulnerable population. This could further streamline these difficult operations in the future.
- The Bureau should consult with experts and research how best to reach and accurately enumerate housing-insecure individuals and families who are not using the homeless shelter systems or living in unsheltered locations.



DATA VISUALIZATIONS AND GEOGRAPHIC DATA

The Census Bureau published several data visualizations related to 2020 self-response rates and related operational data, including easy access to related information such as the local concentration and patterns of contact strategies (English-only or bilingual, “Internet First” or “Internet Choice” mailings) and Type of Enumeration Area (TEA) designations. The Census Bureau’s “Response Outreach Area Mapper” (ROAM) application showcased the Bureau’s Low Response Score metric. It represented the Bureau’s most prominent, public-facing web visualization platform to help stakeholder groups, journalists, elected officials, and others prepare for the 2020 Census self-response phase. The variety of visualization tools provided some benefits to stakeholders. But the range of tools caused confusion. The lack of interoperability across visualizations was limiting and the premier public-facing visualization leading up to the 2020 count, intended to provide stakeholders with essential strategic data to boost self-response rates – the ROAM map – suffered from several limitations that undermined its value.

ROAM was developed using volunteer staff support within the Bureau and relied on an existing platform with insufficient attention to its actual utility for census partners. For example, before the application launched publicly, the Bureau did no substantial “user testing” to share the features and details of the ROAM application with stakeholder groups. Consequently, ROAM suffered from some design flaws. In addition, the Bureau diluted its impact and limited the platform’s ability to integrate other data sets related to 2020 outreach, by launching several other online mapping sites such as the *Census Engagement Navigator*, the *Type of Enumeration Area Viewer*, the *Mail Contact Strategies map*, and the *Complete Count Committee map*. Each of these independent mapping sites featured information about census operations that could have been integrated into one application – such as ROAM – to show the relationships among the different features and elements of the census. With an integrated approach, partner organizations can avoid visiting multiple websites and can visualize related information. When the 2020 self-response operation began, the Census Bureau launched *another* mapping site – the Self-Response Rate Map – which was completely divorced from all of the previous mapping websites. The lack of integrated sites and information meant stakeholder groups had to toggle between three different maps in order to visualize the relationship between self-response rates and the Bureau’s mail contact strategies.

Building on work done in 2010, philanthropic institutions supporting census stakeholder efforts decided to create their own online interactive map as a shared resource, focused on 2020 Census outreach and education. Having their own map, designed and managed by the City University of New York (CUNY) Mapping Service, allowed philanthropy and stakeholders to be more flexible than the Census Bureau by easily incorporating data sets that the Bureau may not have wanted or been able to highlight (such as tracts with the lowest self-response rates or areas with the greatest risk of undercounting young children). CUNY consulted stakeholder groups frequently to ensure that its map would help local efforts and would be user-friendly. The interactive map, available at www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us, used visualizations such as bar charts and graphs to help reveal trends across time. Information relevant to self-response rate patterns was included on the map within a narrative context, so stakeholders would understand which data points were helpful specifically to different types of outreach (compared with the long list of ACS data points provided for each geographic area via the ROAM application that had little explanation about why each number was important or not). CUNY’s *Census 2020 Hard to Count / Response Rate* map also integrated multiple data sets related to self-response, including mail contact strategies, Complete Count Committee lists, and more, as well as NRFU completion rates at the appropriate time. This allowed stakeholders to access the information in one place. On the map, data meant to supplement other information was integrated visually and also displayed and explained in narrative form in text bars.



In March 2020, as the Bureau prepared to launch peak census operations, the Bureau provided the final self-response rates from the 2010 Census at all geographic levels, providing a comparable framework for what to expect in 2020. Then, starting in late March and continuing throughout the extended 2020 data collection period to October 2020, the Bureau provided an easy way for stakeholders to download the actual 2020 self-response rates at all geographic levels, initially on a daily basis and eventually every weekday. Stakeholder organizations of all types and sizes used this information to understand how well their communities were responding to the 2020 Census and to analyze these rates in relation to local demographic characteristics. This information enabled stakeholders to shift resources and efforts to areas with lower self-response rates. The Bureau also began posting completion rates from the Nonresponse Follow-up Operation at the Area Census Office level — information that was helpful but could have been even more useful to guide resource allocation and targeting if it had been available at lower geographic levels.



While accessing the data was easy and direct, the Census Bureau introduced limitations that created confusion among stakeholders. First, the Bureau did not provide “self-response” rates *during* the 2010 Census. Instead, the Bureau used a different metric called “participation rates,” which measured self-response using a modified denominator (housing units minus units with undeliverable addresses). This meant that for the entire decade before March 2020 when the Bureau published actual 2010 self-response rates, stakeholders were only familiar with “participation rates” (although many stakeholders were not familiar with the difference in the measures). Many stakeholders (especially local and state government officials) therefore based their 2020 self-response goals on a comparison with 2010 participation rates, even though the two measures reflected different outcomes. This was methodologically flawed and resulted in goals that were impossible to meet (the 2010 participation rate for a given area would almost always be higher, sometimes much higher, than self-response rates simply due to math: the participation rate denominator was smaller than the response rate denominator, so if the numerator — the number of self-responding households — was equal, the participation rate would necessarily be higher).

Second, also in March 2020, the Census Bureau caught stakeholders by surprise when it decided to use “planned 2020 geographies” to publish 2020 self-response rates. Initially no one knew what “planned 2020 geographies” were, until CUNY staff and state data center colleagues obtained clarification from the Bureau that these geographies — especially census tracts — were an interim version of tracts and other areas that would eventually be used to publish 2020 Census data. This interim step was problematic for several reasons. Initially, no one had GIS files of these “planned 2020 geographies.” Eventually the Bureau published the data on a *file transfer protocol* (FTP) site, but only after stakeholder groups requested it. The “planned 2020 Census tracts,” in particular, did not match the 2010 Census-vintage tracts for which all American Community Survey (ACS) estimates through 2019 were published. Therefore, stakeholders would not be able to directly compare tract-level demographic characteristics with 2020 self-response rate patterns. Eventually the Census Bureau — in response to stakeholder requests — published a “crosswalk” relationship file to match 2010 tracts with “planned 2020” tracts. The 2020 rates cannot be directly compared with demographic data published before (using 2010-vintage tracts) or after

(for the 2020 Census data that will be published using the final 2020 geographies). The 2020 self-response rates were fundamentally important during the 2020 data collection period. But beyond that, their use is greatly limited because of the Bureau's decision to use "planned 2020 geographies" to publish the 2020 rates in real time.

- The Bureau should improve geographic area data to guide outreach, track self-response, and monitor nonresponse follow-up progress.
- The Bureau should provide stakeholders with the necessary data to inform outreach and education aimed at boosting self-response rates. The Bureau should consult with stakeholders to maximize the ability of stakeholders to inform the Bureau's products as well as to leverage the ability of stakeholders to tailor their own products. The Bureau should avoid visual products that create confusion and unnecessary additional work for stakeholders.
- The Bureau should consider visualization platforms to be as important as public relations and advertising campaigns in terms of helping partner organizations and stakeholders put data intended to guide outreach and education to its best use. This approach requires commensurate investments in staff, technology, and design so that platforms are best-in-class, with robust usability features, professionally-customized interfaces, and sufficient consultation with stakeholders to maximize usefulness in educating media and policy makers and in helping funders and stakeholders to target their investments strategically.
- The Bureau should provide more detailed information on nonresponse follow-up completions on a more granular level and continue to provide information such as the self-response rate rankings by state and other geographies that were a useful set of visualizations for stakeholders because it enabled stakeholders to compare their efforts easily with progress in other areas and target their outreach efforts.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS TO INFORM AND SUPPORT THE 2030 CENSUS

There are research recommendations throughout this report. The following are additional suggestions for the Bureau to consider.

RESEARCH TO REDUCE UNDERCOUNTS OF THOSE HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE DATA COLLECTED

According to Census Bureau measurements, there has been a net overcount of non-Hispanic Whites since the 2000 Census, and persistent net undercounts of African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians on reservations, and to a lesser extent, Asian Americans as a whole. In 2010, according to the Bureau's own research, approximately 16 percent of Black men between the ages of 18-50 were missed but the research agenda, advertising, and partnership outreach strategies did not reflect this reality.

Young children were also undercounted in 2010 and there is reason to believe they might have been undercounted as well in 2020. National tests such as those conducted in the 2020 planning cycle are unlikely to identify the full range of challenges and potential solutions. Roster research (testing what would best improve who is included in the list of people in the household) that focuses on families with young children is a critical part of this process.

Households have grown increasingly complex in their make-up for many reasons, resulting in the growth of multi-generational households and households with multi-families or unrelated people living together or people who are temporarily in the household. In Ohio, a group working on GOTC observed that in nontraditional households, people who were not in the position of responsibility for the whole household or viewed themselves as temporary residents were less likely to feel responsible for responding to the census invitation or completing a census form mailed to the home. In addition, those filling out the form were more reluctant to answer detailed questions about others living in that household who were not related to them or for whom they had no financial or familial responsibility. These factors could contribute to the problem of omissions -- and, therefore, an undercount -- in larger or extended households that otherwise respond to the census; younger adult men of color, in particular, could be at risk of being missed in this way.

People with disabilities are an incredibly diverse group. Many more people with disabilities are living independently or in group homes than in the past. In 2020, a broad cross-section of partner organizations had questions about how the census counts people with disabilities. Service providers and community advocates want to understand how they could assist, especially because persons with disabilities who live on their own often lack access to the resources needed to participate easily.

- The Bureau should expand its research into the underlying factors that contribute to the disproportionate undercount of people of color, renters, and young children, and the overcount of the non-Hispanic White population. The research should inform new design elements for the 2030 Census that can address the reasons for the persistent differential coverage in the census.
- The Bureau should consult with experts working with or representing people with disabilities, to develop a research agenda aimed at improving the enumeration of this often-overlooked population and investigate possible barriers to participation that might affect the accuracy of the count of people with disabilities. It should



also research appropriate outreach measures to ensure that persons with disabilities and their caregivers understand the importance of the census and the various accommodations available to facilitate their response.

- The Bureau should research and develop strategies that more specifically target the most highly undercounted segments by age and race within the racial and ethnic groups at risk for significant undercounting.
- The Bureau should use the ACS and other ongoing surveys as test-beds to better understand the reason for child omissions in the census and other data collection programs.
- To reduce “within household omissions,” the Bureau should identify and test new strategies for ensuring that everyone living in a housing unit -- including people who are not related or are a separate family unit -- is included in that household’s response, perhaps by encouraging people who are not related or who comprise a separate family unit to submit their own non-ID response.

IMPROVE USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

It is highly likely that the Bureau will explore an even greater use of administrative records in the 2030 Census. Possible uses include administrative records enumeration when households decline to participate or to replace in-person visits as a cost-saving measure; enumeration of a greater number of Group Quarters; and enumeration of people experiencing homelessness in sheltered and unsheltered situations. Pandemic-induced problems in 2020 laid bare some of the gaps in administrative records. For example, when colleges elected to electronically transfer administrative data or were subsequently asked by the Bureau to do so once students had left campus, it became apparent that some institutions would provide only minimal data (such as a basic count and names) out of concern that, without a targeted waiver for census purposes, they might violate provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For the 2020 Census, however, the Bureau decided not to use some potentially high-quality state administrative records, in part because of the inconsistent quality of the records among the states and in part because not all states agreed to provide the same sets of records, raising questions of equity.

In addition, the research conducted for 2020 did not look closely at how well administrative records covered the young child population. For example, tax records, which are one of the Bureau’s most trusted external data sources, cannot capture babies born in the first three months of the census year, nor do they reflect doubled-up households or other non-dependent household members, unless the second household or additional individuals file separate tax returns with the same address.

- The Bureau should continue research on the use of administrative records, when appropriate, to supplement direct enumeration and develop a robust plan to improve the quality and usability of those records for all population groups and types of households.
- The Bureau should work with privacy experts, civil rights advocates, and other knowledgeable stakeholders to improve incorporation of administrative records in the 2030 Census.



USE OF TECHNOLOGY

For 2020, the Census Bureau sought to leverage advancing technology in many of its operations. During the NonResponse Follow-up operations, it used it to plot efficient routes for census takers going to households who had not responded. The census takers also used it to enter the data from households and upload it into the Bureau's systems and the Bureau used it to monitor the productivity of its census takers. Impressively, the Bureau managed to keep their data systems secure. And of course, it extensively used social media tools.

However, technology was less well deployed in terms of helping potential census workers get answers to questions. The only chatbot used for hiring by the Bureau was not marketed and was not easily accessible. It also was not especially successful, as it was not developed based on training data from historically undercounted population groups and failed to answer simple questions. The effort also was understaffed and there was no follow-up to address questions that could not be answered automatically. The Bureau also was not allowed to use on-line tools widely used by corporate America to individually target ads to potential customers.

- The Bureau should explore ways to better incorporate and deploy cutting-edge technology throughout its operations for the 2030 Census and the American Community Survey.

PERSUASION TOOLS

For funders, government officials at all levels, business leaders, educational institutions, libraries, community leaders, community based organizations, and all their constituents, one of the most persuasive reasons to support and participate in the census is to ensure that every geographic area receives its fair share of federal expenditures — including grants, tax credits, and procurement contracts — based on accurate census data.

Building on similar efforts for the 2010 census and, to encourage support and engagement in the 2020 Census Get Out the Count campaigns, state and local government officials, federal courts, the media, funders, and partner organizations relied on a detailed, comprehensive series of philanthropy-funded *Counting for Dollars* briefs by Andrew Reamer, Research Professor, Institute for Public Policy, George Washington University, with assistance from Sean Moulton, Project on Government Oversight, or **POGO**, Census Project. The *Counting for Dollars 2020* project identified 316 federal programs that allocated over \$1.5 trillion in census-guided federal assistance in Fiscal Year 2017 and provided program data by state and, for select programs, by local areas. The comprehensiveness, detail, and analyses provided by the Counting for Dollars reports were especially important in encouraging full community participation in the 2020 Census and overcoming distrust of government and other concerns.

Currently, the Census Bureau does not systematically track federal expenditure programs that rely on census-derived data. The report it prepared in advance of the 2020 Census cited a national figure of \$675 billion annually through 132 programs, reflecting a much narrower set of criteria and analysis than Dr. Reamer's. Over time, media reports replaced the Bureau's less robust figure with Prof. Reamer's comprehensive one. In addition, the Bureau lacks important information it could use to more effectively promote participation in the American Community Survey, which guides more federal spending than any other dataset derived from the decennial census.

- The Bureau should develop and maintain a comprehensive resource cataloguing the use of census derived data for the geographic allocation of federal assistance. To achieve this end, the Bureau should consider obtaining information and guidance from experts such as Professor Reamer.

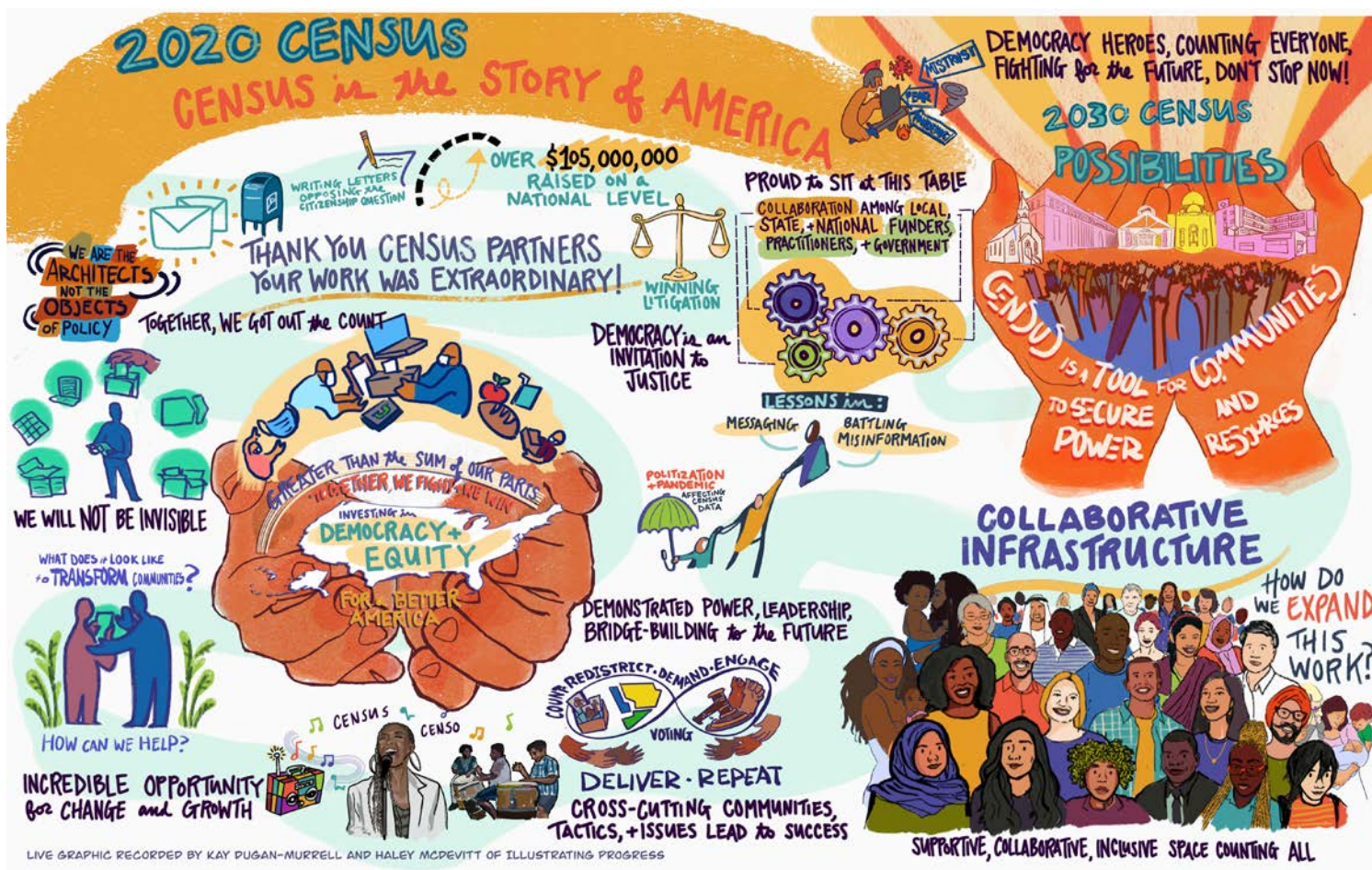
The Bureau should revise the way it presents and explains measurements of census accuracy, to elevate components of error, including omissions and duplications, as equally consequential to net under- and overcounts.

- The Bureau should invest in research exploring the use of census data by state government agencies in their allocation of state and federal expenditures and other uses of census-derived data such as enforcement of civil rights law and industry regulation of bank and mortgage services.

5. MEASURING UNDERCOUNTS AND OVERCOUNTS

In calculating net undercounts, the number of people missed (omissions) can be offset by the number of people counted twice (duplications), in the wrong place, by mistake, or other erroneous enumerations, which can leave the impression that census accuracy is more evenly distributed than highly differential components of census coverage show the results to be. Many advocates believe discussions of census accuracy should highlight data about omissions, duplications, and other measures of total (“gross”) error, all of which offer a truer picture of potential disparities in census results that can affect implementation of civil rights laws and the fair allocation of government funds based on population shares.

- The Bureau should revise the way it presents and explains measurements of census accuracy, to elevate components of error, including omissions and duplications, as equally consequential to net under- and overcounts.



LOOKING TO CENSUS 2030

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