

Ensuring a Fair and Accurate Census 2020 Count

The 2020 Census is a crucial issue, as severe budget cuts by Congress and the political climate are expected to result in a large undercount of low-income and immigrant people. The impact of undercounting immigrants and low-income people will be severe for local communities.

States have a direct monetary and equity interest in supporting a fair and accurate count, as federal funding for \$400 billion in funding is driven by the Census count. The nonprofit community shares that interest. An active partnership between state governments and the nonprofit community will be the most effective way to ensure a fair and accurate count.

The Census Bureau provides limited resources to community-based organizations, who are vital to providing effective outreach efforts to communities deemed “hard to count” due to barriers including language or lower incomes.

There are no second chances to get this once-in-a-decade Census count right.

Census 2020 is fast approaching, and states need to take a leadership role in funding and facilitating partnerships with the nonprofit community.

What’s at Stake?

Each 1% undercount costs California \$670 million per year. Over the 10-year lifespan of the Census, each 1% undercount will cost California \$6.7 billion.¹ Traditionally, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, low-income communities, children, and the homeless have been disproportionately undercounted.

Census data is used to determine the level of federal funding for vital services such as schools, hospitals, health clinics, and jobs. It also determines the size of congressional representation for each state. Effective Census counts can make the difference for another seat in the House of Representatives. Undercounted people lack political representation.

Based on a timeline recommended by 2010 California Complete Count Committee in 2012 for planning and implementing 2020 Census outreach, the state is already two to three years behind where it should be on outreach planning. Every month that passes without ramping up planning diminishes the impact we can have and the number of people who will be counted.

Why Achieving an Accurate Census 2020 Count Is a Major Issue

Achieving an accurate Census count has never been easy, especially in low-income and immigrant communities where addresses change frequently, English isn’t a first language, and engagement with government services can be problematic.

The success of Census 2020 has been imperiled by:

- Decreases in federal funding for enumerators and outreach funding
- Reliance on an unproven, untested technology-based approach
- Increased fear, especially within immigrant communities, of answering government questionnaires

Why and How States and the Nonprofit Sector Can Work Together

The nonprofit community is a proven effective resource for engagement with low income and immigrant communities. Typically, undercounted populations know and trust local nonprofits, making them ideal partners for promoting Census participation.

Furthermore, the nonprofit community has historically engaged in Census education and outreach. For the 2000 Census, when California Governor Gray Davis set aside \$24.7 million to fund a groundbreaking statewide outreach campaign, California was the first of only five states to meet the U.S. Census Bureau's "90 Plus Five" challenge, which encouraged states to increase their 2000 Census response rates by 5%. California gained one additional seat in Congress based on the 2000 Census. In the 2010 Census, California did not invest nearly as much in community-based education and outreach and did not pick up a new congressional seat. The state's mail participation rate was 3% lower than in 2000.

An effective program of education and outreach would contain the following components:

1. Assessing capacity and establishing coordination committees

- a. Assess statewide readiness and discuss outreach challenges and opportunities with multiple stakeholders.
- b. Hire additional state staff to coordinate the readiness assessment and create an infrastructure for coordination to ensure hard-to-count communities are covered.
- c. Establish Complete Count Committee at the state level and support the establishment of Complete Count Committees in all major cities and counties.
- d. Engage community-based organizations, Departments of Human Services, County Offices of Education, and businesses to incorporate Census information into their programs.

2. Enabling hard-to-reach people to receive their U.S. Census postcard

Up to 50% of the undercount is due to people not receiving a Census form because their address is not on the Census Master Address File. The Census Master Address often does not include "low-visibility" addresses, such as SRO hotels, trailers, and commercial buildings where people may be informally living. The nonprofit community can conduct "address canvassing" to provide these addresses of these "low visibility" to the Census Master Address.

- a. Analysis and identification of areas to target for address canvassing.
- b. Planning, coordination, and execution of door-to-door address canvassing by nonprofits.
- c. Setup of technology to enable nonprofits to easily collect and submit potential low-visibility addresses to the U.S. Census Bureau.

3. Recruiting local, trusted enumerators

Recruiting enumerators who speak the language and are trusted by their communities can have a huge impact on people's willingness to open their doors, and provide personal information to a stranger.

- a. Nonprofit outreach to encourage community members to apply to be Census enumerators, promote the job openings, and help with the job application process.
- b. Conduct community research and testing to find out what messages work best with immigrants and low-income populations.
- c. Develop technology plan to activate community members to apply for the jobs using technology such as web, email, texting, and social media.
- d. Plan, coordinate, and execute in-person outreach.

4. Educating, motivating, and activating respondents

- a. Conduct community research and testing to find out what messages work best with immigrants and low-income populations.
- b. Plan and scope use of technology, including use of texting and digital media. Effective, personalized, and scalable digital communications campaigns to assure people of the importance and safety of taking the Census. Develop technology plan to activate people to complete the Census with direct links to call centers and online links, and sends reminders on participation.
- c. Plan, coordinate, and execute in-person outreach

Conclusion

There has never been a Census with a greater risk of a severe undercount. An undercount will hurt low-income and immigrant communities the most, by impacting the resources available for state services and limiting their political representation.

A strong partnership between the state and the nonprofit community is essential to addressing this risk. Technology advances have the potential to significantly enhance community outreach through data analysis and communications. To effectively develop the right tools and processes, coordinated planning needs to begin as soon as possible. State funding would greatly advance that process.

It is important that we provide funding not only this year, but also in the years leading up to rollout and outreach in 2020.

An accurate Census count will ensure that our state get the economic and political representation that it deserves. We respectfully request \$3 million in the 2017–2018 budget for planning related to the state's 2020 Census outreach programs.