

# LOOKING TO CENSUS 2030

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**FROM CENSUS 2020 PARTNERS AND FUNDERS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

OCTOBER 2021

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **L**OOKING 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 VISIT** If you haven't filled out the Census yet you may get a visit to your home from a Census worker starting SEPT. 12th.  
**VISIT!** Fill out the CENSUS safely in your home!

**66.5% PINA COUNTY RESPONSE RATE**  
 TASA DE RESPUESTA DEL CONDADO PINA

| Response Rate | Counties              |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 85% or more   | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 75 to 84%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 65 to 74%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 55 to 64%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 45 to 54%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 35 to 44%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 15 to 34%     | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| 1% or less    | Alameda, Contra Costa |
| No data       | Alameda, Contra Costa |

**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**  
Return your census form in the envelope provided.

**EVENTOS/EVENTS:**  
 Sept. 24, 2020 (sábado/Thursday) **Census Counts National Test Run** - Join us for one last push to get out the count! We'll be visiting Arizona and other low-count states like TX, MS and LA.  
 5:55PM @ Register here: <http://bit.ly/countdownatlanta>  
 Sept. 25, 2020 (viernes/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 (viernes/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 Erika@cenuscounthang (510-477-2278) so we can share them with the rest of the A2 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.

