VERMONT

August 2021

Census data determines the allocation of federal and other funds to vital social programs, guides redistricting, and informs research. Therefore, an accurate census that captures historically undercounted populations[1] is crucial for our democracy. Since 2016, a collaborative of philanthropic funders has worked to align and pool funding to build and strengthen the infrastructure needed to support a fair and accurate count.

The Democracy Funders Collaborative's Census Subgroup, which is the steering committee for the census funder collaborative, engaged ORS Impact as a partner to develop state-level reports that provide an overview of philanthropic efforts to promote the 2020 Census within and across the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This report provides a summary of census efforts for the State of Vermont based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=2).

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[1] We have opted to use the term "historically undercounted populations" in our narrative, but the term is interchangeable with "hard to count," which we use when our informants opted to do so
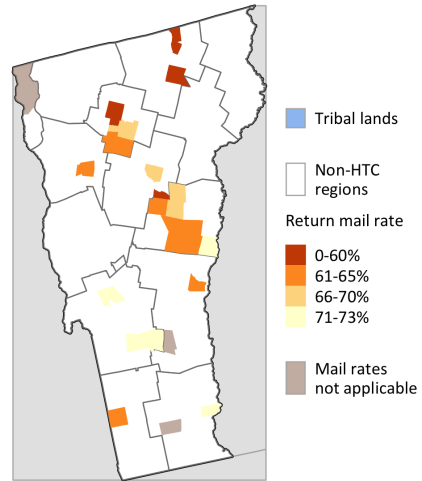
OVERVIEW GOING INTO 2020 CENSUS

624,977

TOTAL POPULATION

62,102

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY

Tribal lands

Non-HTC regions

Return mail rate
- 0-60%
- 61-65%
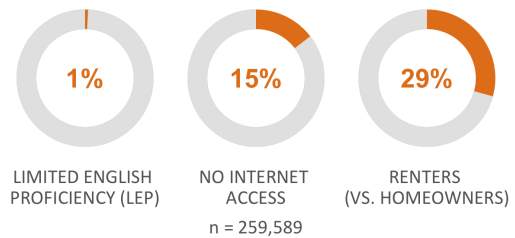- 66-70%
- 71-73%

Mail rates not applicable

Special update/enumerate method
used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

Population

Past analyses of Census data have consistently shown differences in self-response rates based on household or individual characteristics, indicating that certain populations are at higher risk of being undercounted. The following graphs show the distribution of selected populations within the state that have historically been more likely to be undercounted. Data for all maps and graphs provided by CUNY Graduate Center via the Census 2020 Hard to Count/Response Rate map at www.CensusHardToCountMaps2020.us.

HOUSEHOLDS

Percent of total number of households in the state that have the following characteristics:

1%
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP)

15%
NO INTERNET ACCESS
n = 259,589

29%
RENTERS (VS. HOMEOWNERS)

INDIVIDUALS
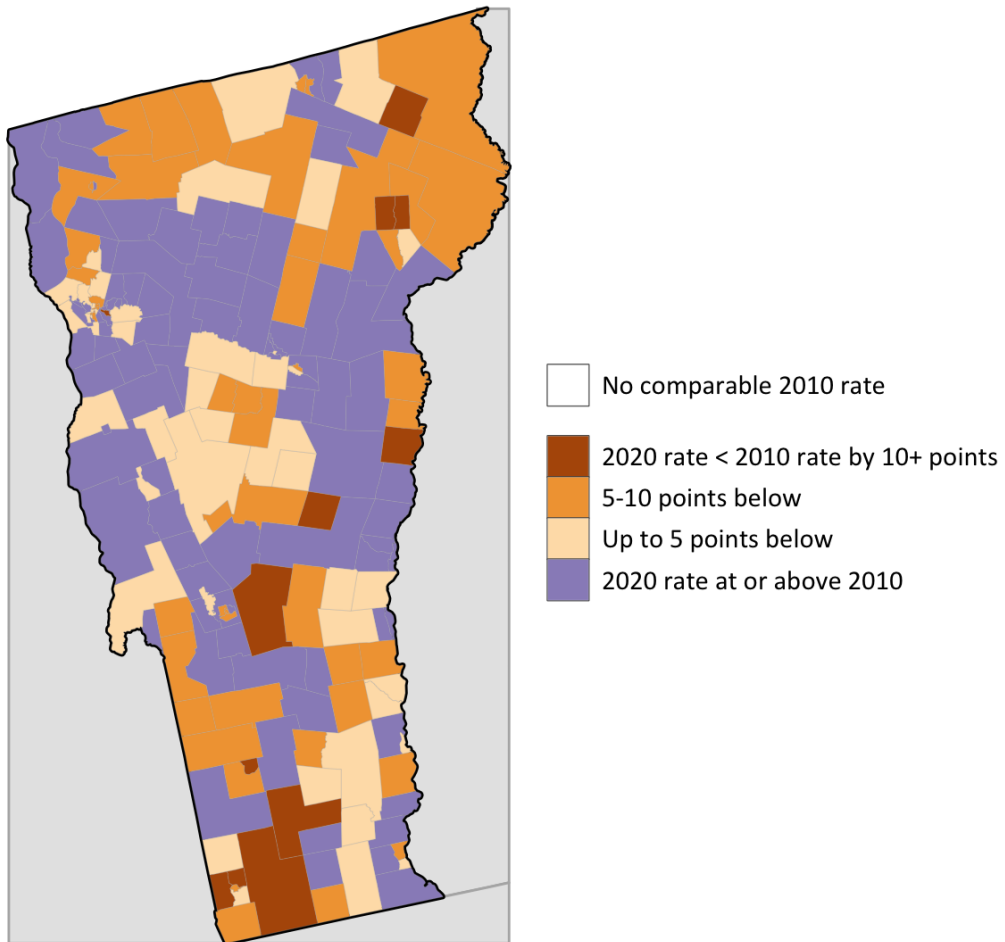
Percent of total number of individuals in the state that have characteristics of historically undercounted populations:

- American Indian — 1%
- Asian — 2%
- Black — 2%
- Hispanic — 2%
- Native Hawaiian — <1%

5%
< 5 YEARS OLD

5%
BORN OUTSIDE OF THE US
n = 624,977

11%
LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS
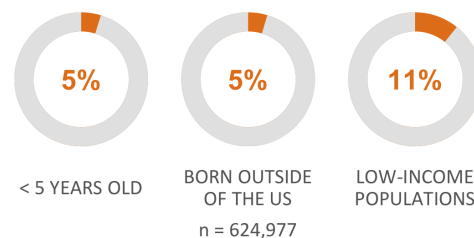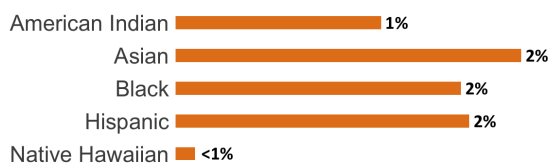
OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	**60.5%**	**+0.2**
2010	60.3%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010

☐ No comparable 2010 rate

■ 2020 rate < 2010 rate by 10+ points
■ 5-10 points below
■ Up to 5 points below
■ 2020 rate at or above 2010

STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Vermont's census outreach efforts were led by the State Complete Count Committee in collaboration with local complete count committees and the Census Bureau. Efforts to support the census in Vermont got underway in January of 2020 when the State Complete Count Committee formed by executive order. The Vermont State Data Center and the state librarian co-chaired the State Complete Count Committee and coordinated efforts on behalf of the state. The State Complete Count Committee included representatives from state government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local governments. The State Complete Count Committee worked closely with 6–8 local complete count committees to organize their efforts. They also leveraged the support of around 30 nonprofit organizations, tribal groups, and health organizations. Strong political support in the state from influential government actors—such as the governor, congressional representatives, and local government officials—also propelled efforts in the state.

Vermont is a small state government and nonprofit actors were already largely connected prior to the beginning of 2020 Census efforts. Early discussions about the census among actors in the state first began in 2017–2018, but efforts did not really get underway until early 2020 when Vermont formed the State Complete Count Committee.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts[2]:

Actor	Role
University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies, Vermont State Data Center	The Vermont State Data Center is a cooperative program between the state and the US Census Bureau to make data available locally to the public through a network of state agencies, universities, libraries, and regional and local organizations. As state data coordinator, Michael Moser acted as a co-chair of the State Complete Count Committee.
Vermont Libraries	Jason Broughton, the Vermont state librarian, served as the co-chair of the State Complete Count Committee, mobilizing state government support for the census.

[2]Data reflects the Census Bureau's last update of self-response data (published in January 2021), which differs from the CUNY maps that use data from October 2020

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Overall, at least $17,500 of funding supported census efforts in Vermont.

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach[3]

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
Philanthropy: $15,000	• One national funder provided $10,000 to the State Complete Count Committee to provide grants to nonprofit and advocacy organizations, particularly in communities of color • One local funder provided $5,000 for a messaging campaign to push back on anti-census rhetoric from the Trump administration
State Government: $2,500	• The state contributed $2,500 for a communications campaign through the Agency for Commerce and Community Development. • The state also provided modest compensation to the co-chairs of the State Complete Count Committee
In-Kind Contributions: Unknown	• The bulk of efforts in Vermont were supported via donation of staff time and efforts from state and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations

DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Efforts in Vermont centered on mobilizing existing infrastructure to get the word out about the census. The State Complete Count Committee mobilized local community groups to work with historically undercounted populations and encourage participation in the census. Groups used a variety of in-person strategies to engage with historically undercounted populations, which included in-person events. Both the Census Bureau and community organizations commonly employed the strategy of mobile questionnaire assistance to support people in completing the census. Public libraries held trainings for enumerators and language access webinars and disseminated information about the census to community partners. Other tactics included radio and

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[3]Funding data should be taken as estimates. We included data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and Census Equity Fund (CEF) grants where applicable; other figures are estimates provided by key informants

television interviews, radio advertising in multiple languages, and social media engagement. Focusing on immigrants and new Americans, the State Complete Count Committee worked with the state's refugee resettlement program to run educational campaigns and assure newly arrived immigrants that census data would not be used against them. National groups, such as the AARP and the United Way, also provided effective messaging to local chapters working in Vermont.

Collaboration among state, local, and federal government was critical to efforts. There was a high level of coordination with the Census Bureau. Prior to COVID-19, there were in-person meetings to communicate with the Census Area Office and local complete count committees. Vermont's state librarian acted as a key coordinator, creating an open and transparent communication structure with partners via weekly calls with updates. These calls included check-in meetings with the Census Bureau to get real-time data, disseminate information from national census partners, and incorporate data to pinpoint geographies with low response rates.

The governor, legislators, and other state and local officials were strong census advocates. Due to budget shortfalls, the state did not contribute funding to census efforts, but they contributed in other ways by holding press conferences and conducting interviews with positive census messaging. For example, when the governor encouraged citizens to complete the census, spikes in the count indicate surges that may be attributable to the governor's involvement.

COVID-19 disrupted all in-person engagement, but there were a few silver linings. In the early days of the pandemic, the state moved members of the homeless community into old hotels, which allowed the Census Bureau and community organizations focused on homelessness to count that population more easily.

Local, tailored messaging worked well in some areas. One messaging effort that proved effective in Burlington was a flyer that described the issues that first responders and healthcare providers face when trying to reach populations in certain areas of the state. The messaging connected these disparities in health care access to funding from the federal government, motivating citizens to complete the census to support better health service.

The shifting deadlines for the census created confusion. Shifting deadlines and resistance to sharing data from the federal government created confusion among complete count committees and volunteers. Luckily, the high level of coordination with the local Census Bureau and support from the governor allowed for plans to adapt to the new timeframe.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Starting efforts earlier could have benefited census outreach and strengthened the infrastructure built by the State Complete Count Committee.**
- **Getting more resources into the field would have enhanced efforts**. Getting more resources to groups on the ground would have especially helped to enhance the count.

LOOKING FORWARD

The collaboration between nonprofit organizations, advocates, and state government through the 2020 Census effort will help sustain relationships between these groups. This has laid the groundwork for more in-depth work on future issues across the state.

DATA SOURCES

Representatives from the following organizations participated in interviews and/or contributed information for this report:

- Vermont State Data Center at University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies
- Vermont Department of Libraries