

Why the 2030 Census Matters for Community Voice

Accurate census data is one of the least seen but most powerful tools for ensuring communities are heard—in rural towns, tribal nations, immigrant neighborhoods, and communities of color across the country.

The census was written into the Constitution to ensure every community receives fair representation and resources. It determines how political representation is distributed and how more than \$2 trillion in federal resources reach communities each year. When everyone is counted, communities gain the representation, resources, and voice to shape their own future. Community organizing begins with accurate data, and accurate data begins with the census. This factsheet outlines how funders who care about community organizing and community leadership can help ensure we have fair and accurate census data.



What's the Census?

Every ten years, the U.S. Census Bureau counts every person living in the United States—a constitutional requirement that shapes our democracy and public spending for the next decade. The census determines political representation, and it serves as the statistical backbone for funding decisions in every policy arena. **Each year, census data, together with the American Community Survey, is used to direct over \$2 trillion in federal spending and helps ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely.** Alongside the decennial census, the annual American Community Survey provides ongoing demographic data that community leaders, advocates, and funders rely on to build power and direct resources to their communities.

Why It Matters for Community Voice

It's hard to overstate the significance of the census in determining which communities have a voice—and which are overlooked. Representation and resources follow the count. The census:

Translates Being Counted into Fair Representation

The census is the foundation of equal representation in America. The number of people counted in a community determines how much voice it holds—from city councils and school boards to state legislatures and Congress. When communities are fully counted, they gain a stronger hand in the decisions that shape their lives. When they are missed, that voice is diminished for a full decade. As community leaders in Pennsylvania described it, the census is fundamentally about being seen: When people are not counted, their communities receive fewer resources, less representation, and less power to shape what happens next.

Directs Resources to the Communities That Are Counted

Representation and resources move together. Census data guides more than \$2 trillion in annual federal spending, and an accurate count is how a community claims its fair share. The stakes are

An Accurate Census Helps Communities:



Gain fair political representation at every level of government



Direct federal resources to the people who are counted



Build the trusted-messenger networks that power lasting organizing

concrete: researchers estimate that every person left uncounted cost Pennsylvania roughly \$20,000 in federal funding over the decade. In Texas, an undercount of more than 550,000 people in 2020 translated into an estimated \$25 billion in lost federal funding over ten years—and the loss of a seat in Congress. Undercounts also translate into lost state and local government funding. If you are a funder who cares about community voice, every dollar you invest in the census has a multiplier effect through the resources and representation that flow to the communities you care about.

Builds Power Through Trusted Messengers

The most effective census outreach is led by the people communities already trust—neighbors, faith leaders, and local organizations who can navigate language barriers, digital gaps, misinformation and skepticism about government surveys. Funding this outreach does more than improve the count: it strengthens the trusted-messenger networks and leadership that communities rely on to organize and advocate for fair representation and resources. In Pennsylvania, the community-led Keystone Counts coalition grew from 27 organizations to more than 100, and in nine of its 12 priority counties, self-response rates beat the statewide average.

Turns the Count into Lasting Representation

Census participation is often a community's first step into civic life—and it opens the door to more. After the 2020 count, Pennsylvania organizers used the relationships and leadership they had built on the census to organize on the once-a-decade redistricting process, where communities have too often been shut out when maps are drawn. Community leaders trained their members, testified at hearings, and drew proposed maps to keep neighborhoods whole. The results included the most representative incoming class in the history of the Pennsylvania State House, district maps that more closely reflected the communities that drew them, and a landmark decision to count many incarcerated people at their home addresses rather than in distant prisons.

Strengthens Communities Most Often Left Out

The communities the census most often misses—rural areas and tribal nations, immigrant and low-income families, young children, and communities of color—are the same communities with the most to gain from being fully counted. An accurate count brings them visibility, resources, and a stronger hand in shaping policy. In Washington State, a coalition of 92 tribes and organizations recruited more than 700 trusted messengers and helped the state reach the second-highest self-response rate in the nation in 2020—proof of what becomes possible when communities lead.

Our Path to a Complete 2030 Count

The 2030 Census is being planned right now: how the Census Bureau will reach undercounted populations, what resources will be available, and how data will be collected.

The federal government will not provide the resources for comprehensive community outreach. That's where philanthropy comes in. We have a proven model from 2020, when foundations came together through the Census Funder Collaborative to raise more than \$120 million for the national effort and an additional \$75 million for state-based activities.

Philanthropic investment made a measurable difference: **"Civil society saved the 2020 Census."** That's the conclusion drawn by one evaluation. The infrastructure built for 2020 continues working today—supporting broadband access, civic engagement, and other community campaigns. Everyone counts, and together we showed we can make sure everyone is counted.



Join Us!

The Census Funder Collaborative is actively welcoming new funders.

You can:

- ▶ **Provide funding directly** to trusted community organizations doing census outreach
- ▶ **Leverage your convening power** to bring together stakeholders for 2030 planning
- ▶ **Help your colleagues understand** the importance of census data to your work
- ▶ **Contribute to CFC's pooled fund** to support coordinated national and state efforts

When we count every community, we strengthen the representation and community voices that a healthy democracy depends on.

Ready to Learn More?

Contact the Census Funder Collaborative at info@censusfunders.org to explore how your foundation can support a fair and accurate 2030 Census.

