



Why the 2030 Census Matters for Place-Based Funders

For funders invested in a specific place, the decennial census is one of the most consequential forces shaping the resources, data, and political voice that define your community's future. Place-based funders make thousands of decisions guided by one fundamental assumption: we know our community: who lives there, which neighborhoods are growing or struggling, and how much public funding supports schools, hospitals, housing, schools, roads, and other services. But all that knowledge rests on a single foundation: 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. **Each year, census data, together with the American Community Survey, is used to direct over \$2 trillion in federal spending and serves as the statistical backbone for funding decisions in every policy arena.** For family foundations whose philanthropy is often rooted in place, this connection is especially powerful: census data provides the hyperlocal information needed to understand community demographics, identify emerging needs, and guide investments that improve opportunity and quality of life across the places they call home.

Why It Matters for Place-Based Funders

When the census undercounts your community, the consequences compound across every issue you may care about—and they last for a full decade. The census:

Directs billions of federal dollars to your community—or away from it

The federal government uses census data to allocate more than \$2.2 trillion annually through more than 370 federal assistance programs, including funding for schools, roads, hospitals, housing, nutrition assistance, and economic development. This allocation is geographically precise: an undercount in your community means it receives less than its fair share for an entire decade. Six states had statistically significant undercounts in 2020 and their communities will feel the effects in reduced federal resources through 2030. Texas alone is projected to lose more than \$25 billion in federal funding due to its undercount. And the problem isn't confined to states: many federal programs allocate funds directly to tribes, counties, cities, and school districts, meaning communities can suffer significant local undercounts even when their state's overall numbers are accurate. The primary factors determining how much census-guided federal funding a state receives are its poverty rate and the percentage of its population living in rural areas—not raw population size. This means communities serving low-income residents and rural populations have the most to lose when the census falls short.



Accurate Census Data:

**Determines how much
federal funding your
community receives**

**Shapes your
community's
political power and
representation**

**Supplies the
neighborhood-level
data foundations
can't get anywhere else**

Shapes your community's political power and representation

An undercounted community is an underrepresented community. Census data determines how seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are apportioned among states, and it drives the redistricting process at every level of government—congressional, state legislative, county, school boards, and water districts. When residents are missed, their neighborhoods carry less political weight in the budget and policy decisions for the next decade. For place-based funders investing in schools, health care, housing, or economic opportunity, accurate representation is not a separate issue from program funding—it is the mechanism by which communities secure their fair share of resources.

Powers the data that your foundation and grantees rely on to do their best work

Nearly every strategic decision a place-based foundation makes—where to direct investments, which communities have the greatest needs, how to measure impact over time—relies on census and ACS data. Funders use this data to track population change, understand demographic shifts, identify underserved neighborhoods, and target resources where they are most needed. Your grantees depend on it too, to document community need in their grant applications, program design, and evaluations. Most of the research that foundations and their grantees commission on socioeconomic issues relies on the census as its statistical foundation. When the census undercounts a community, foundations and nonprofits alike are making decisions based on a flawed picture of the very community they are trying to serve.

Protects rural and small communities from being miscounted and miscategorized

Place-based funders serving rural regions, small towns, and dispersed communities face a particular challenge: these are the same communities that are hardest to count. Limited broadband access makes online census responses more difficult. Dispersed populations are more costly and complex for the Census Bureau to reach. For many small towns and rural counties, the decennial census and the ACS are the only data sources detailed enough to capture local conditions reliably; other national surveys have sample sizes too small to produce trustworthy estimates at the county or sub-county level. Yet even the ACS is under strain: its sample size hasn't grown since 2011 while response rates have declined, eroding the reliability of local estimates, particularly for subpopulation analysis. That makes getting the decennial count right in 2030 even more essential. An inaccurate census doesn't just deprive these communities of federal funding—it makes them statistically invisible.

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—strengthening the community organizations and local networks that place-based funders depend on. Everyone counts, and together we showed we can make sure everyone is counted.



Join Us!

Place-based funders, including those who are family foundations, can play a uniquely powerful role in supporting a fair and accurate census: you know your communities, you fund the organizations closest to them, and you have the relationships with local leaders and are trusted messengers to your communities that make effective outreach possible.

The Census Funder Collaborative is actively welcoming place-based 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 every person in every community is accurately counted, the people who depend on public services get the resources they deserve.

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.



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