

# **U.S. Census 2020 and the Role of Nonprofits and Local Governments: Background Paper**

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Joint Hearing, August 13, 2018

The census, mandated by Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, has been conducted every 10 years since 1790 and seeks to provide an accurate count of the entire U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Census data is used nationally to apportion seats for the House of Representatives and to disseminate billions in federal funding. Because of this, undercounts critically impact states, local jurisdictions, and their populations.

California is the largest and hardest-to-count state, with 10 of the country's 50 hardest-to-count counties, including Los Angeles, the most difficult.<sup>2</sup> Hard-to-count areas tend to have many immigrants, non-English speakers, renters, and low-income individuals, among other demographics.<sup>3</sup> The Census 2020 includes further challenges for California: It will be the first digital census to use an online self-response, and the U.S. Census Bureau aims to have about half of the count completed in this manner.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the census questionnaire may include a question regarding citizenship—a decision being challenged by a number of states, including California.<sup>5,6</sup> Not only could Internet response be low due to privacy and security concerns, but rural and poor areas of California may face challenges in accessing the Internet.

Local governments and nonprofits are key partners in the state and federal census process because they are trusted messengers in their local communities and also recipients of much of the federal grant funding allocated based on census numbers, including the National School Lunch Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicaid, Child Care and Development Block Grants, and Head Start. In his April 13, 2018, executive order establishing the 2020 California Complete Count Committee (CCC), Governor Brown said the state's census outreach strategy should include partnerships with nonprofit community-based organizations.<sup>7</sup> Further, the state budget allocated funding to develop an online portal known as Statewide Outreach and Rapid Development (SWORD), which uses mapping tools to view area demographics and will convey real-time response rate during the census count.<sup>8</sup> SWORD will support collaboration between stakeholders and allow for agile outreach planning and deployment. Local governments and nonprofits can fill gaps in the Census Bureau's outreach strategy to ensure an accurate count for California.

## **Local Governments**

Local policy makers use census data to identify community needs and distribute funds and services based on population numbers or other community characteristics the census measures. Local governments therefore have an important role to play in informing their communities about and supporting census operations. One of the first critical tasks for census operations for local entities is reviewing and updating the Census Bureau's master list of addresses for their residents in a process called the

Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA).<sup>9</sup> The LUCA deadline for changes and replacement files was June 1, 2018; and California reported good participation by city, county, and tribal governments.<sup>10</sup> Local government leaders also work with the CCC to host Regional Readiness Assessment Convenings, intended to provide information about the 2020 census, as well as mapping and demographic data, and identify challenges with hard-to-count areas. The CCC organized 23 of the meetings across the state beginning in April 2018 and intends to provide virtual meetings for more rural communities. The goal is to create a space for cross-sector interaction of local entities and help local representatives identify opportunities for partnerships with local foundations and organizations to help increase the response rate.

California's local governments have a critical role to play in outreach and communicating the importance of the Census 2020. Specifically, local governments have greater knowledge of the local needs and concerns—especially in hard-to-count areas—and can therefore target outreach and are better positioned to create relevant and culturally centered content to increase participation. For example, according to the CCC's final report after the 2010 census, the Census Bureau sent a Native American print ad featuring the Great Plains in the background to the Hoopa Valley Tribe in Humboldt County.<sup>11</sup> A local government has better understanding of its communities than the federal government and can formulate messaging that is relevant and reflective of residents. During the 2010 census, local governments created public service announcements, sponsored events in hard-to-count communities, and advertised on local media outlets.<sup>12</sup>

Local government entities also may be able to assist in counting unique groups such as homeless populations as counties are key providers of social services and homeless services. According to the CCC, the Census Bureau is in charge of counting homeless populations nationally; however, California cities and counties had concerns that their homeless populations would not be accurately counted without the involvement of local municipalities.<sup>13</sup> There may be opportunities to develop strategies and communication to coordinate with the bureau's homeless count for Census 2020.

### Educational Entities

Many federal grant programs that distribute funds to children and young people are allocated funding based on decennial census counts, including the Children's Health Insurance Program, Child Care and Development Block Grants, and educational grants for schools with high numbers of children from low-income families.<sup>14,15</sup> Students not only are important to count accurately, they also serve as trusted messengers to their families and social groups, especially students from immigrant or non-English-speaking families or communities.

## *K–12*

California implemented several outreach efforts in schools during the 2010 census using tool kits and proposed lessons and exercises with input from the California Teachers Association and the State Board of Education.<sup>16</sup> To help with outreach and communication, the CCC recommended the 2020 census effort devote multiple full-time staff members to K–12 schools.<sup>17</sup> The state plan for census outreach includes school based efforts, such as developing school-based curriculum pilots with Sacramento, Los Angeles, and Fresno county offices of education with modules and lessons engaging fifth-, eighth-, 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students.<sup>18</sup> The pilots are expected to be expanded along with additional school outreach efforts during fiscal year 2018–19.<sup>19</sup>

## *Early Childhood*

Children younger than age 5 are undercounted at a higher rate than any other age group, and experts estimate young black and Hispanic children have the highest net undercounts. Approximately 6.5 percent of black and Hispanic children younger than age 5 were undercounted by the 2010 census, roughly twice the number of white children.<sup>20</sup> California has more children younger than age 5 living in hard-to-count census tracts than any other state.<sup>21</sup> Early education entities such as preschools or organizations such as First 5 California should be considered trusted members of the community. First 5 California and the Women, Infants and Children program, for example, provide services for low-income families, generally considered hard to count.

## Unions

Union members account for about 15.5 percent of wage and salary workers in California—or about 2.5 million individuals.<sup>22</sup> Unions are uniquely positioned to coordinate efforts with business, as well as state and local entities, to develop relevant outreach campaigns. For example, in 2010, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor produced a census outreach ad that ran on local radio during baseball games.<sup>23</sup> Unions also sponsor events for members, as well as regular newsletters and other forms of communication that could be an opportunity for census outreach.

## Nonprofits

Nonprofits, advocacy or civil rights groups, and charitable foundations provide additional funding and outreach opportunities that can stretch state and federal dollars allocated to census activities. The state received several philanthropic investments to help bridge the shortfall of public funds in 2010.<sup>24</sup> Such groups also tend to have strong relationships with their members—many of them likely in hard-to-count target audiences such as immigrants and low-income individuals—by providing services, support, and grassroots campaigns. Many nonprofits also rely on federal grant money to support their community needs and fund programs and understand the importance of obtaining an accurate count in California.

Several nonprofits are already gearing up for Census 2020. For example, the Advancement Project convened the Census Policy Advocacy Network, a collaborative effort targeting undercounted populations with a number of partners, including Disability Rights California, Children Now, and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights.<sup>25</sup> Several other groups, such as Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, have formed grassroots campaigns against the proposed citizenship question on the census survey.<sup>26</sup> Other nonprofits may be able to provide language or translation services for non-English-speaking communities to answer questions and assist in completing the census survey.

Nonprofits and civil rights groups should have a unique understanding of their members' barriers to participation and disseminate messaging and information to alleviate concerns or problems with completing the survey. In addition, since the Internet will be the primary tool for the 2020 census count, nonprofits may play a role in increasing Internet—as well as computer (or mobile)—access or setting up secure hubs for responding to the census survey.

### Faith-Based Organizations

Privacy is a primary concern for Census 2020 so it is important that information and outreach efforts come from trusted members of the community. Faith-based organizations have dedicated audiences and are trusted members of the community, especially within certain areas that may distrust government entities. The California Catholic Conference and Congregation Kol Ami were partners with the state in 2010 and conducted outreach activities with members.<sup>27</sup>

### Additional Opportunities

Local governments, nonprofits, and other entities can form a coordinated outreach plan that can help stretch state and federal funding and target hard-to-count areas to achieve a full census count. The U.S. Government Accountability Office has designated the Census 2020 as high risk due to cost, unused technology and innovations, and canceled field tests, among other findings, so it is important for California to rely on partners within the state to ensure an accurate count.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to local governments and nonprofits, there may be opportunities to partner with businesses. For example, the CCC partnered in 2010 with Ralphs Grocery Co., which printed a census message on receipts.<sup>29</sup> Since technology will play an important role in Census 2020, the state might explore partnerships with Silicon Valley and other technology firms for outreach, as well as opportunities for increasing Internet accessibility in rural and low-income areas.

—Sara Noceto, Senate Office of Research

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