

May 2019

Advocacy Toolkit

Using Your Local Budgets to Ensure a Fair Count of Your Community



The decennial census is directly connected to ongoing efforts to protect, defend, and invest in our communities, and in the current political climate it takes on heightened urgency. Getting the 2020 Census count right is critical—it will shape political representation, public policy and funding, private sector investments, and determine whose voice is heard at every level of our democracy. Communities that have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised have long been undercounted in the census. For the 2020 Census, this potential undercount is only compounded by the Trump administration’s policies that are hostile to these communities and that will undermine the census participation and count. An inaccurate and manipulated census could have a dramatic long-term impact on communities and their power in our democracy.

In jurisdictions across the country, local elected officials are fighting for policies to help families and communities thrive together—investing in affordable housing, public education, quality health care, improved workplace standards, and more. As an elected official, you stand to lose resources to address all of these priorities if the 2020 Census undercounts the people and communities in your jurisdiction and state. “Hard-to-Count” (HTC) populations—that is, communities of color, young children, residents with low incomes, those with low English proficiency, renters, those who are homeless, undocumented immigrants, rural communities, single-female-led households, and members of the LGBTQ community¹—are at particular risk of losing resources and political influence after the 2020 Census and the 2021 redistricting process.*

Efforts to undermine an accurate census count and skew the count of certain communities are acts of disenfranchisement that will mute the voices and diminish the democratic representation of these undercounted groups. As ever, the diversity and full representation of all our residents matter for the health and well-being of our communities and our popular democracy.

Given the unique challenges of the 2020 Census, local elected officials have a critical role to play in fighting for a fair and accurate census. **You have a unique tool: the power to provide budgetary resources to ensure that get out the count (GOTC) efforts reach Hard-to-Count populations in your local jurisdiction.** This toolkit provides an overview of how the census impacts local jurisdictions and how you can use your local budget authority to support a fair count in your community.[†]

In the months leading up to the 2020 Census, Local Progress and the Center for Popular Democracy will follow up with additional tools and guidance around how to support GOTC work in your area, strategies to address key threats to a fair census (including the citizenship question), and how to effectively partner with community organizations most in tune with the needs and concerns of local communities.

* It should be noted that, depending on the local geography, the HTC populations used in the calculations below are defined as either: 1) the percentage of households that did not respond by mail to the 2010 Census, adjusted for the number of vacant households (the mail non-return rate) or 2) the percentage of questionnaires mailed back by households that received them, which do not adjust for households that are vacant (the 2010 Census participation rates).

† For a comprehensive guide describing how cities can prepare for the 2020 Census, see: “Municipal Action Guide: Preparing for the 2020 Census,” National League of Cities, 2018, https://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/users/user89/CS_CENSUS_MAG_FINAL_1116_0.pdf.

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Background

Why a Complete Count Matters to Your Local Jurisdiction and State

At a moment when the federal government is abandoning its responsibility to ensure that all communities are accurately counted and represented in the 2020 Census, local elected officials play a critical role in the fight to ensure a fair census in local jurisdictions. The census plays a vital part in determining political representation, allocating needed resources, and informing fundamental decisions by public, non-profit, and private entities. It touches your constituents' lives on many levels.

The census is used to determine political representation, including at the local level. Census counts are used to draw state, county, and municipal district lines, directly influencing the political power of local communities.² Census data is also used to determine how many Congressional representatives each state will have for the next ten years.³

The census determines funding levels that impact local communities. Census data is used to determine how much funding communities receive for local infrastructure and social services, based on collected population levels.⁴ Population size and demographics determine the distribution of \$800 billion each year in federal funding for health care, education, social services, job training, and infrastructure.⁵ Some of the major affected federal programs that have a direct impact on local residents include:

- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers/Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments, which depend partially on census and American Community Survey data to determine local housing needs (administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD])⁶
- Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grants, which help local governments redevelop local public and assisted housing (administered by HUD)⁷
- Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies, which allocate funds to low-income schools and school districts (administered by the Department of Education [ED])⁸
- Head Start, which provides early care and education for low-income children (administered by the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS])⁹
- Special Education Grants, awarded to local education agencies (administered by ED)¹⁰
- Health Centers Program, which helps communities open health clinics (administered by HHS)¹¹
- Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (administered by HHS)¹²
- Other programs that impact local funding include the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)¹³ (administered by HHS),¹⁴ the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)¹⁵ (administered by HUD),¹⁶ and the Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program¹⁷ (administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA]).¹⁸

Census data is used to inform local policymaking, research, and philanthropic decisions.¹⁹ A 2017 survey of city staff across the United States found that more than 80 percent of local officials use demographic data, specifically from the census and the American Community Study (ACS),²⁰ to inform decisions on about how to allocate resources and prioritize projects when it comes to local infrastructure, public health, and food security.²¹ Philanthropic organizations also use demographic and socioeconomic data from the census to determine funding priorities and inform decision-making.²² An incomplete count would mean that the needs of communities that are most at risk of being undercounted would be underrepresented in policy making priorities and funding decisions.

Census data informs how businesses make decisions. Businesses often make decisions about where to locate based on census data.²³ By ensuring complete census counts, local elected officials can help to attract high-road businesses[‡] that create jobs for local community members and generate a larger tax base to fuel the local economy.

With so much at stake, local elected officials and local governments have a vested interest in ensuring that every person is counted. An accurate census count is vital for the well-being and political representation of your residents, jurisdiction, and state over the next decade.

‡ High-road employers are businesses with responsible practices, such as providing living wages; maintaining a healthy workplace through paid sick days, vacation, and health insurance; and creating career ladders by providing training and internal promotions. See, for example: "Taking the High Road: A How-To Guide for Successful Restaurant Employers," The Restaurant Opportunity Center and Dr. Rosemary Batt, January 2012, <https://rocunited.org/publications/taking-the-high-road-a-how-to-guide-for-successful-restaurant-employers-2/>.

Threats and Challenges to the 2020 Census

Every census has the challenge of accurately counting HTC populations, which include communities of color, particularly Black and Latinx communities;²⁴ young children (under the age of five);²⁵ residents with low incomes; those with low English proficiency; renters; those who are homeless; undocumented immigrants; rural communities; single-female-led households; and members of the LGBTQ community.²⁶ These populations are at constant risk of being undercounted and, therefore, underrepresented and under-resourced.

While the challenge of accurately counting certain populations is ongoing, there are a few unique challenges and threats to a fair and accurate census in 2020. These challenges include the potential inclusion of a citizenship question, the addition of an online response option, and even higher funding gaps than in previous years.

Specifically, these challenges include the following:

Mistrust of government and concerns about the citizenship question: As the Trump administration continues to advance anti-immigrant policies and spew xenophobic rhetoric, many targeted communities are fearful of the government. Trump's politicized attempt to add a question about citizenship to the census questionnaire has raised fear in immigrant communities about what the administration will do with that data and concern that the administration may not comply with current laws protecting census data. If it survives current litigation, the Secretary of Commerce's inclusion of an untested and unnecessary citizenship question would dampen participation and increase the undercount, particularly among immigrant communities.²⁷ By June 2019, the Supreme Court will ultimately determine whether or not the citizenship question will remain on the census questionnaire. Its inclusion jeopardizes an accurate count because of the almost-certain drop in participation by noncitizens and mixed-immigration-status households, which will lead to a significant undercount in immigrant communities.²⁸

The digital divide and new technology: For the first time, households will fill out 2020 Census information online, as well as by mail and phone.²⁹ Because many households (an estimated 12.6 million) do not have access to broadband³⁰ and others lack internet technology literacy,³¹ a significant number of residents could go uncounted, particularly in rural and low-income communities.³² In addition, there have not been enough resources or sufficient testing devoted to ensuring the online census reaches even those who have computers at home.³³ Further, to address mail non-response rates, the Census Bureau is considering using administrative records to procure informa-

tion about households that do not respond to the census, while scaling back on in-person follow-up visits. However, research shows that there are challenges when it comes to matching administrative records to people who belong to racial and ethnic minority groups, further increasing the chances of these groups being undercounted.³⁴

Insufficient funding: Currently, the census stands to be vastly underfunded,³⁵ increasing the likelihood of an inaccurate count. The census has been chronically underfunded for years and the Trump administration's census funding requests are too low to ensure an accurate count,³⁶ with proposed increases far less than in previous decennial census cycles.³⁷ President Trump requested a \$6.15 billion appropriation to the Census Bureau, including \$5.3 billion in direct funding for the 2020 Census; advocates urge Congress to appropriate \$8.45 billion to the Census Bureau, including \$7.581 billion in funding for the 2020 Census.³⁸ The federal government is also reducing the number of enumerators, whose purpose is to reach non-responding households; this reduction increases the probability of an undercount in HTC communities.³⁹ In addition, due to funding constraints, the census canceled a number of field tests and reduced the scope of its "dress rehearsal" test in 2018, which replicates the full census in several key geographic areas.⁴⁰ The dress rehearsal, which was originally scheduled for three locations, only happened in one. This test provides a critical opportunity to test IT systems and Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) activities, conduct outreach and education activities with community partners and the public, update the address list the Bureau uses to reach households, and evaluate the accuracy of counting residents in the test area.⁴¹

Ultimately, by under-resourcing the census and stoking fear with anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric, the Trump administration threatens to manipulate and distort federal funding and political representation for potentially millions of people. A failed census would have extreme consequences for the resources available to vulnerable communities and the health of our representative government. **This is an all-hands-on-deck moment to ensure a census that strengthens, rather than undermines, an inclusive representative democracy at every level of government.**

Leveraging Local Power:

Using the Power of the Purse to Ensure Communities in Your Jurisdiction Are Counted

The unique challenges of the 2020 Census require local and state engagement in funding GOTC activities and efforts to fully engage and protect populations at risk of being undercounted or targeted. As an elected official, you have powerful tools to play an essential role in ensuring that the communities in your jurisdiction are counted. Specifically, you can allocate and leverage the resources of your city, county, or local government to support the efforts in your community to achieve a complete count. The sections that follow provide tools to help you educate your colleagues and the public of the importance of investing local resources into GOTC activities.

Step 1: Show what your local jurisdiction could lose if the census undercounts its population. Use the formula below to calculate funding losses to your jurisdiction that would result from a census undercount.

Step 2: Determine the amount of funding necessary to support a complete count in your jurisdiction. Use the formula below to calculate the amount of resources you should allocate in your budget to support a complete count.

Step 3: Work with your colleagues to provide the necessary resources in your local budget for a complete count in your jurisdiction.

Step 1: Show what your local jurisdiction could lose if the census undercounts its population

To build the case for allocating local funding for GOTC efforts, start by educating the public about the urgency of this investment and the local necessity of an accurate census. Follow the steps below to estimate the financial impact that a census undercount could have on your jurisdiction over a ten year period. These figures will help you educate your constituents and colleagues about why local investment in census efforts is important to achieve an accurate count.

- **First, determine the HTC population in your local jurisdiction.**
 - For counties: Use this [CUNY tool](#) to estimate the HTC population in your county.[§]
 - For cities or smaller geographies: Use [census participation rates](#) to estimate the HTC population in your area.[¶]
- **Next, calculate the funding loss to residents in your local jurisdiction as the result of an undercount.** The census will determine the allocation of \$800 billion in federal funds each year.⁴² For many federal programs it is not possible to calculate an exact per person per dollar figure lost due to an undercount. However, it is possible to do so for five health programs, which constitute about 48 percent of federal funds granted to states.⁴³ For these programs, the median loss per person missed in the 2010 Census was **\$1,091 per year**.⁴⁴ Over the entire decade (from 2010-2020), that means that local residents stood to lose over **\$10,000 per person** missed by a census undercount (based on these five federal programs alone). Since these figures only account for roughly 48 percent of federal funding to states, this is a highly conservative figure, and true losses would be much greater.

[§] This tool uses the mail non-return rate, or the percentage of households that did not respond by mail to the 2010 Census. See: "HTC 2020," CUNY, Accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.censushardtocomountmaps2020.us/>.

[¶] Census participation rates are a slightly different estimate than the mail non-return rate but are available at the city level. (The CUNY tool does not offer cities.) The mail non-return rate is a more accurate measure than the participation rate because it adjusts for addresses that the Census Bureau determines are vacant. The participation rate includes vacant units. See: "2010 Census Participation Rates," United States Census Bureau, Accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2010/dec/2010-participation-rates.html>.

To obtain a rough estimate of how much funding residents in your jurisdiction could lose in ten years (for the five federal programs described above), follow this formula:

Estimated Funding Loss to Your Community Over 10 Years = HTC Population x Estimated Yearly Funding Lost per Person x 10 years	
<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Example</i>
1. Calculate the HTC population in your jurisdiction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For counties, use the CUNY tool⁴⁵ ○ For cities or other local jurisdictions, use census participation rates⁴⁶ 	In King County, Washington, 79.3% of residents mailed in their questionnaires in 2010. This means that 20.7% of King County residents were HTC.
2. Find your local population using ACS Fact Finder ⁴⁷	The population for King County (2017 ACS 5-year data) is: 2,118,119
3. Find the HTC population by multiplying the population size by the mail non-response rate.	2,118,119 x 20.7% = HTC population of 438,450
4. Multiply HTC population by amount of funding lost per person each year (\$1,091).	438,450 x \$1,091 = loss of \$478.3 million to residents in King County each year
5. Multiple annual loss by 10 to get the total loss of funding to residents in your jurisdiction for the decade.	\$478.3 million x 10 = loss of \$4.78 billion to residents in King County over 10 years

Estimated funding loss to your community



By calculating the funding losses of an undercount, you can help educate the public and fellow public officials about the urgency of local government action to support a fair and accurate count. This will help build the foundation for including resources in your local budget to support 2020 Census efforts.

Step 2: Determine the amount of funding necessary to support a complete count in your jurisdiction

Demonstrating the potential financial losses to your community because of an undercount is the first step; now you can calculate how much local funding is needed to support local GOTC efforts.

Local governments are critical to ensuring that jurisdictions have the resources needed to get out the count, and you can play an essential role by allocating local funding to support census outreach efforts to HTC communities.** A primary strategy for ensuring a representative count and reaching populations most at risk of being undercounted is working with and funding community-based organizations (CBOs), which can include grassroots and advocacy groups at the local, state, and national levels. CBOs often have the knowledge and trust of community members, making them well-equipped to reach specific HTC communities. They play a critical role as messengers and validators in census outreach work.⁴⁸

To estimate the associated costs of reaching HTC communities through CBO outreach, Census Counts 2020 has developed a widely used methodology.⁴⁹ It estimates the cost associated with three levels of outreach.^{††} All three levels of outreach are necessary to reaching as many HTC residents as possible:

- **Basic outreach** for community-based organizations includes hosting public forums, providing information to people who come to their institutions, and some level of direct outreach. Basic CBO outreach costs \$2 per person, and 100 percent of the HTC population should receive this outreach.

** It should be noted that, although some states may also allocate additional resources to GOTC efforts, the federal funding gaps are large and additional local funding will also be necessary.

†† Moderate outreach is inclusive of basic outreach and intensive outreach is inclusive of moderate and basic outreach. The standard for this analysis has been that 100 percent of HTC people receive basic outreach, 10 percent receive moderate outreach, and 5 percent receive intensive outreach.

- **Moderate outreach** includes public forums and broad outreach, in addition to in-person discussions with people in HTC populations. Moderate CBO outreach costs \$25 per person and 10 percent of the HTC population should receive this outreach.
- **Intensive outreach** includes multiple contacts with HTC individuals and some longer sessions explaining the process, including in-language discussions for households with limited English proficiency, outreach to homeless populations, and work with people who do not have access to the internet or are less familiar with computers. Intensive CBO outreach costs \$75 per person and 5 percent of the HTC population should receive this outreach.

Below is a step-by-step way to calculate the amount of resources your specific jurisdiction needs to allocate in your local budget to adequately fund CBO outreach, a critical component of GOTC efforts:

Estimated Local Funding = HTC Population x Cost of CBO Outreach	
<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Example</i>
1. Estimate the HTC population in your jurisdiction. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Calculate the percentage of HTC residents in your jurisdiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For county-level HTC population, use the CUNY tool⁵⁰ For city or smaller jurisdiction, use census participation rates.⁵¹ Find your local population using ACS Fact Finder.⁵² Apply the HTC percentage by the total population to determine the HTC population. 	Tempe's 2010 Census participation rate was 70%. This means that 30% of Tempe's residents were HTC. The population for Tempe (2017 ACS 5-year data) is: 178,339 people $178,339 \times 30\% =$ HTC population of 53,501
2. Calculate the cost of doing CBO outreach. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Basic outreach: Multiply the HTC population by \$2 per person. Moderate outreach: Calculate 10 percent of the HTC population and then multiply by \$25. Intensive outreach: Calculate 5 percent of the HTC population and then multiply by \$75. 	$53,501 \times 100\% \times \2 per person = \$107,003 for basic outreach $53,501 \times 10\% \times \25 per person = \$133,754 for moderate outreach $53,501 \times 5\% \times \75 per person = \$200,628 for intensive outreach
3. Calculate the total budget allocation needed. Add basic, moderate, and intensive totals to calculate the total amount of funding needed to reach HTC populations through CBO outreach.	$\$107,003 + \$133,754 + \$200,628 =$ \$441,385 (the amount of funding Tempe needs for CBO outreach)

Estimated funding to put in your budget



Step 3: Work with your colleagues to provide the necessary resources in your local budget for a complete count in your jurisdiction

With the 2020 Census less than a year away, there is an urgent need to protect a fair census and ensure that census outreach has resources to reach communities at risk of being undercounted. Given the uncertainty and concern about sufficient and timely funding at the federal level, it is imperative that local jurisdictions prioritize budgeting and appropriating the resources that Complete Count Committees (see description below) and CBOs will need to fully count every person in the jurisdiction.

Local jurisdictions have varying calendars and processes for allocating budget items and supplementary funding. It is critical that local leaders work together to appropriate the necessary local resources this spring and summer to ensure that there are sufficient funds for the start of peak operations in January 2020.

Additional Ways to Exercise Leadership in Support of Census Efforts⁵³

As a local elected official, you play an important role in ensuring your communities are counted. In addition to appropriating local resources for get out the count efforts, as a public leader, you can:

Use your local power

- Create a Complete Count Committee (CCC) in your jurisdiction. A CCC is a volunteer committee that draws on their knowledge of local communities to increase awareness about the census and encourage a response from community members.⁵⁴
- Work with your colleagues to appropriate resources in your budget needed for a complete count in your jurisdiction.
- Invite the Census Bureau to present their 2020 changes and updates at council meetings to promote awareness among council colleagues.

Use your voice to lead locally

- Help the Census Bureau hire qualified enumerators from HTC communities in your area, for example by connecting with community organizations that can work with the agency to hire members of the community or by partnering with local workforce development agencies and community colleges to promote job openings.⁵⁵ It is critical that the census recruit and hire individuals who can speak languages appropriate to your jurisdiction and are from the HTC communities in which they work.⁵⁶
- Host public events to promote census awareness and act as a trusted leader by working with populations that are particularly vulnerable to being undercounted in your area.
- Follow the lead of local CBOs working in HTC communities, particularly given the risks and fears in immigrant communities around the potential inclusion of a citizenship question.

Use your voice to advocate federally

- Advocate that Congress fully fund the 2020 Census to ensure sufficient census funding in the federal budget for 2020 so that all communities are counted.⁵⁷
- Help shape the public debate this spring by making your voice heard in opposition to the citizenship question.⁵⁸

Timeline for Engaging in Local GOTC Activities

Advocacy and outreach efforts are already underway and additional education and resource investments need to start immediately! Here is a brief timeline of some key ways you can take action to support the 2020 Census efforts in 2019 and 2020:

2019

- Demonstrate the need for census funding in your jurisdiction and pass budget appropriations to fund local GOTC efforts.⁵⁹
- Help the Census Bureau recruit and hire people from HTC communities in your area to serve as enumerators, address listers, and Area Census Office workers.
- Join rallies when the U.S. Supreme Court issues its opinion on the citizenship question case (likely June 2019).
- Establish or get involved with an already existing CCC and help develop a strategy and work plan.
- Meet with local CBOs to understand the concerns and issues of HTC communities.

2020

- Continue to support the recruitment and hiring of people from your community to serve as enumerators and other census field staff.
- Work with CCCs to begin community mobilization to get out the count and to encourage self-response to the 2020 Census.
- Use your local jurisdiction's social media channels to amplify messages about the upcoming census.
- Hold public events to promote civic engagement and 2020 Census participation.
- April 1, 2020: Census Day⁶⁰
- May-July, 2020: Work with CCCs and CBOs in your area to implement the outreach plans for households who do not respond to the census questionnaire.
- Continue to meet with local CBOs and grassroots leaders to provide support around specific concerns related to immigrant communities.

For more information, please contact **Emma Greenman**, Director of Voting Rights and Democracy at the Center for Popular Democracy: egreenman@populardemocracy.org.

Notes

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10. Ibid.
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12. Ibid.
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14. "Community Services Block Grants," Office of Community Services, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/csbg>.
15. Sophie Khan et al, "Why a Fair and Accurate Census Matters to Thriving Private and Public Sectors," 5.
16. "CDBG: Community Development Block Grant Programs," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg/>.
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18. "Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-economic-development-loan-grant-program>.
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56. For more information on census enumerators, see: "Field Job: Census Takers/Enumerators," Census Outreach, Accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.censusoutreach.org/census-enumerators>.
57. Terri Ann Lowenthal, "Recommended FY 2020 Appropriation for the 2020 Census: The Stakeholder Case for Sufficient, On-Time Funding."
58. See: "U.S. Supreme Court Citizenship Question Case: Digital Communications Toolkit."
59. Use the tools above to demonstrate potential losses and calculate specific funding levels required to reach HTC communities.
60. This is the day that the decennial census is conducted. See: "Census Day, Two Years and Counting..." United States Census Bureau, April 1, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/2018/census-day.html>.