



THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS:

⋮ A Report of the National Latino
⋮ Commission on Census 2020



MAY 2019

12. Policy Recommendations

The decennial Census involves the nation's largest peacetime mobilization of personnel and resources. Because of the complexity of this undertaking, there are key opportunities for a broad range of organizations and institutions in both the public and private sector to take action to ensure a fair and accurate Census 2020 count. However, federal government policies and actions drive every aspect of the enumeration, including the compilation of the Master Address File; the implementation of the ICP program; the administrative, technological and operational components of collecting data through self-response and NRFU; and the compilation of data and production of data products. In light of the critical responsibility the federal government has for ensuring a fair and accurate Census count, this report's recommendations focus primarily on actions that Congress, the Administration and the Census Bureau need to take.

CONGRESS

Congress has the responsibility of overseeing the Executive Branch's efforts on Census 2020, and it "holds the purse strings" for resources the Bureau receives. Our recommendations:

- Congress must not rely on the U.S. Supreme Court or the Administration to act to remove the citizenship question from Census 2020. It must enact legislation to eliminate the question.
- Congress must continue to conduct oversight hearings to determine Secretary Ross's rationale for adding the question and to help ensure greater accountability by the Executive Branch for its actions.
- Congressional appropriators must provide the Census Bureau with at least \$8.5 billion for FY 2020. They must make the full amount of this funding immediately available at the beginning of FY 2020, when the Bureau will be involved in its final and most critical preparations for the decennial enumeration.
- Members of Congress are uniquely positioned to make the case for the return on the investment of funds for Census 2020. This funding repays itself, often many times over, since an accurate count confers so many benefits on our nation, states, cities, and companies.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

The White House and the Department of Commerce have created many challenges for efforts to achieve an accurate and fair Census 2020 count. The Administration must immediately change the direction of actions that would thwart the Constitutional mandate to obtain a full count of every resident of our nation. Our recommendations:

- The Department of Commerce must reverse its decision to add the citizenship question to Census 2020. It should work with the Bureau to develop communications and outreach strategies to undo the damage that has been done by the public dialogue around the issue.

- The White House and the Department of Commerce must send a strong and unequivocal message that they will comply with the protections in federal law that safeguard the confidentiality of information provided to the Census Bureau. This must be a “top-to-bottom” effort, which starts with the President, and is amplified through every federal agency. Administration officials should cease making statements or taking actions that might suggest they intend to ignore or undermine these protections.

THE CENSUS BUREAU

The Census Bureau has navigated many challenges in the preparations for Census 2020, and still faces funding and operational constraints. However, there is still much the Bureau can do to ensure a fair and accurate count for Census 2020, and in many cases, these efforts involve building on the foundation of efforts that are already underway. Our recommendations:

The Citizenship Question

- The Bureau must advocate with the Administration to comply with the confidentiality protections for Census data and ensure its own compliance. This should also be a key element in its outreach and communications efforts.
- If the citizenship question remains on the Census 2020 questionnaire, the Bureau must take aggressive actions to mitigate its negative impact. The Bureau must revise the ICP to consider the impact of the question, which includes testing on the messages and messengers who might be able to overcome residents’ fear of responding. The Bureau must also provide stakeholders with important information about how the enumeration will proceed if the question remains, including information relating to what will happen if the respondents leave the citizenship question blank, and whether and how the Bureau will use administrative records to impute answers to the question.

Overall Outreach and Communications

- The Bureau must use FY 2019 funding for ICP and local assistance activities in a sound and effective manner, adhering to the mandates in the appropriations report language for increasing partnership program staff, expanding targeted communications activities and establishing community-based QACs in hard-to-count communities.
- The Bureau should promote and support a broad and diverse range of partnership and outreach strategies including:
 - Supporting statewide and local Complete Count Committees;
 - Working actively with Census liaisons in state and local government;
 - Strengthening partnerships with “trusted” community organizations, institutions and individuals, such as health clinics, worker centers, faith-based organizations, schools, consulates and libraries; and
 - Promoting a full range of community “Get-Out-the-Count” (GOTC) activities, including “train the trainer” efforts, celebratory outreach events, arts activities, and in-person contacts.

- While the Bureau has conducted a significant amount of research on the messages that most resonate with hard-to-count communities, it should also work with partners who are familiar with those communities and the best way to reach them. This includes:
 - Working closely with and investing significant advertising dollars into ethnic radio, broadcast, and digital media.
 - Using social media in a strategically-targeted manner.
 - Framing messages that emphasize the impact of an accurate Census count on local communities and residents' everyday concerns.
- The Bureau should conduct its partnership program in a robust way on an ongoing basis, rather than just ramping it up for each decennial enumeration.
- The Bureau should clarify on its job application website and in other materials that it will hire work-authorized non-citizens as outreach staff and enumerators. It should also provide clearer information to stakeholders about the application process for these positions.
- The Bureau should provide real-time feedback to community groups as the enumeration proceeds, providing them with response rates down to the block level.

Reaching Residents in Non-traditional Housing

- All components of the Bureau's address canvassing, ICP and other operational plans must take into account the diversity of living arrangements in our nation, including rural residents in remote areas, persons displaced by natural disasters or economic challenges, the homeless and the incarcerated. It is particularly important that the Bureau have effective strategies for both identifying households living in these areas and arrangements, and for reaching them effectively.

The Digital Divide

- The Bureau should enhance its communication with stakeholders about the extent of its testing of the online form. Many perceive that the technology has not been tested adequately, and fear that the Bureau is unprepared to implement it.
- The Bureau must enhance the accessibility of the online form, by making it easy to use on mobile devices, with cost-free form completion. It should also partner with institutions that can make computers available for online completion like libraries or education centers.
- The Bureau needs to ensure that it both implements the best possible cybersecurity practices, and also educates the public about these protections. It should work with social media companies and online watchdogs to fend off persons spreading false rumors to suppress the count, or other entities which would disseminate misinformation or counterfeit Census sites. It also should work with cybersecurity experts to prevent manipulation of Census data.
- The Bureau must consider the self-response preferences of different population groups for its outreach and operational plans. This includes comprehensive outreach about the different options available for self-response and sound preparations for printing and processing of paper forms. In light of the large share of hard-to-count populations the Bureau may need to reach through NRFU, the Bureau needs to address issues which arose during the E-T-E test and any others which would impair its NRFU efforts.

Reaching and Engaging Residents in Their Own Language

- The Bureau should expand the number of languages it provides for Internet self-response and for online questionnaire assistance.
- In light of the smaller number of field staff it intends to deploy, the Bureau must make the hiring of staff with linguistic skills and cultural competency a particularly high priority.
- The Bureau must help ensure that resources from one area are shared with other areas, and should promote the sharing of resources between language communities.

Ameliorating the Undercount of Very Young Children

- The Bureau should ensure the ICP program includes specific messaging and strategies on counting all very young children in a household. This is particularly important because the majority of children uncounted in 2010 were those left off of households' Census forms. For example, the Bureau should remind households to include "unrelated children" at every opportunity.
- The Bureau should create partnerships with a broad array of government agencies, institutions, businesses, and other entities that reach families with very young children. In doing so, it should take into account the diversity of caretakers for these children, such as grandparents and foster families.
- The Bureau should make its Statistics in Schools program more robust, expanding the program more for Pre-K education and creating partnerships with Pre-K providers.

Reaching Older Residents

- The Bureau should make special efforts to work with government agencies and private organizations that focus on the older population.
- The Bureau should recognize the importance of young people who in certain communities can motivate older residents to participate in the Census, and it should enlist them in efforts for multi-generational outreach.