

## WHAT IS THE CENSUS?

Every 10 years, the United States conducts a “Decennial Census.” The goal of the census is to count every person who lives in the country where they live. This includes people of all ages and citizenship statuses. The census is mandated in the Constitution and it is required by law that you respond.

Traditionally, every household would get a form in the mail that is filled out with information about everyone who lives in the house. You then send the form back. If people do not fill out and submit the census, then people called “Enumerators” will come to your home and ask for the information directly. The 2020 Census will be asking people to fill out the information either on a form they receive in the mail or via an online, internet form.

## WHAT IS THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS) – AKA “THE LONG FORM”?

The American Community Survey, otherwise known as the ACS, is a separate survey that is sent to a smaller group of people in the country every year. The ACS is much longer than the Census Form and collects in-depth information to help learn more about the population of the country. Unlike the census, the ACS is conducted all year every year, but is only sent to a random group of people at any time.

The ACS used to be a part of the census and was called the “long form,” so if you hear someone refer to the long form census they mean the ACS. Since the ACS is a part of the census, it is required by law that you respond to the ACS if you receive it.

## HOW IS CENSUS DATA USED?

Census data is used to help the Federal government decide where money should go. Over \$600 billion per year is distributed to communities across the United States based on census data. This funding includes money on

infrastructure and roads, health care, schools, and more. The more accurate the census count is in your community, the more likely your community is to get the resources that it needs and deserves to serve community members.

Additionally, local government and non-government groups also use census data to determine where to provide services like bus routes, how to design school districts, where to build businesses, and how to prepare for emergencies. Census data is also used to work on Civil Rights issues including determining if states are violating the Civil Rights Act in housing, employment, or education. Enforcement of the Voting Rights Act also heavily relies on information that is gathered in the census.

Census data is also an important part of reapportionment and redistricting. Reapportionment happens following the census and is the process that decides how many seats a state has in the House of Representatives. If the population of a state raises or lowers dramatically, your state could receive more or less representation in the House as a result. Redistricting is the process of dividing up a state into districts based on how many seats the state has. Districts are also drawn using census data for state legislative bodies. Redistricting should keep communities together, which is not possible without an accurate census that tells us where people are.

## WHO RUNS THE CENSUS?

The United States Census Bureau, which is part of the Department of Commerce, conducts the census.

## HOW DO THEY DECIDE WHO GETS THE CENSUS OR ACS?

Every household in the country is supposed to receive an opportunity to complete a census form. In 2020, some households will receive a paper form in the mail while others will receive a postcard with instructions for completing an online form.

## **BUT HOW DO THEY KNOW EVERYONE'S ADDRESS?**

The Census Bureau collects addresses from multiple sources and conducts a program called the Local Update of Census Addresses program, otherwise known as LUCA. Through the LUCA program, states, counties, cities, towns, and tribes can work with the Census Bureau to update their list of addresses to make sure every household is included and getting information about the census. Only 25 percent of localities participated in the 2010 LUCA process, creating a great opportunity to advocate to local officials about participating. The timeline for the LUCA process, as outlined by the Bureau, is:

- ▶ **January 2017:** Advance notification of the LUCA operation mailed to all eligible governments and other LUCA contacts.
- ▶ **March 2017:** LUCA promotional workshops began.
- ▶ **July 2017:** Invitation letter and registration forms mailed to eligible governments.
- ▶ **October 2017:** Training workshops begin. Self-training aids and webinars will be available online at the LUCA website.
- ▶ **December 2017:** Deadline to register for LUCA.
- ▶ **February 2018:** Participation materials mailed to registered participants.
- ▶ **August 2019:** Feedback materials offered to participants with the results of address canvassing.
- ▶ **April 1, 2020:** Census Day.

## **WHAT DO THEY ASK ON THE CENSUS?**

The Census Bureau spends years testing what questions to ask on the census, and how to ask them, to make sure they are obtaining the information they need and helping respondents know how to answer. The 2010 Census asked:

1. How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2010?
2. Were there any additional people staying here April 1, 2010 that you did not include in Question 1?
3. Is this house, apartment, or mobile home: owned with mortgage, owned without mortgage, rented, occupied without rent?
4. What is your telephone number?
5. Please provide information for each person living here. Start with a person here who owns or rents this house, apartment, or mobile home. If the owner or renter lives somewhere else, start with any adult living here. This will be Person 1. What is Person 1's name?
6. What is Person 1's sex?
7. What is Person 1's age and Date of Birth?
8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?
9. What is Person 1's race?
10. Does Person 1 sometimes live or stay somewhere else?

## **WHAT DO THEY ASK ON THE ACS?**

The ACS asks much more in-depth questions and is much longer than the census. Topics on the ACS include the acreage of your property, commuting time to work, computer and internet use, educational level, health insurance coverage, languages spoken at home, vehicles, veteran status, and more. The ACS also includes questions on where you were born and whether you are an American citizen.

## **WHO IS ALLOWED TO BE AN OFFICIAL CENSUS TAKER?**

The Census Bureau hires for the Census Process and makes every person who interacts with census data take an oath of confidentiality for life. If an employee reveals any confidential information, they face 5 years in prison, or \$250,000 in fines, or both. Nonprofits and other groups can't be involved as census takers in the same way they can with other processes like voter registration.

## HOW CAN NONPROFITS BE ENGAGED IN THE CENSUS PROCESS?

The Census Bureau ran a partnership program during the 2010 Census to allow the Bureau to work directly with nonprofits and community organizations to conduct outreach. There are currently plans to run a similar program in 2020, but details are yet to be determined and will rely on future leadership decisions within the Bureau. In the absence of this program, nonprofits can still be involved in the following ways:

**Education:** Nonprofits can fold in education on the 2020 Census to their typical community outreach programs. Many people know about the census generally, but are unaware of the importance that the census plays in determining funding for their community. Nonprofits can help to educate communities about why they should fill out the census and ensure that they understand that they should provide information about everyone in their home including children who often go undercounted.

Communities that do not trust the government or are the targets of discriminatory laws will feel a logical apprehension about telling the government who they are and where they live. Nonprofits can help to educate these communities about the confidentiality of the information they provide to the Census Bureau and can help them understand the benefits that their community can see if they fill out the census.

**Outreach to elected officials:** Nonprofits can engage local elected officials to encourage them to participate in the LUCA program. There are many communities that are classified as “hard to count” by the Census Bureau. Nonprofits often have important relationships within these communities and can help local officials to include the addresses in their LUCA information. Additionally, as potential changes to the census are debated in Congress, nonprofits can provide important information about the importance of the census to elected officials.

**Staffing:** Enumerators, or census takers, play an important role in making sure the count is complete. Nonprofits can keep their members and communities informed about opportunities to apply for these jobs and can help ensure communities are reflected in their local census taker workforce.

**Access to Technology:** The 2020 Census will rely more heavily on the use of the internet as they do not have the budget to send a paper form to all households. Nonprofits can partner with service provider or conduct townhall style events that can provide internet access for those who are looking to respond to the 2020 Census but lack appropriate internet access to respond at home.

## WHAT ARE THE HARD TO COUNT COMMUNITIES YOU JUST MENTIONED?

Hard to count communities are those that have traditionally been harder for the Census Bureau to reach. They include:

- ▶ Racial and ethnic minorities
- ▶ Persons who do not speak English fluently
- ▶ Lower income persons
- ▶ Homeless persons
- ▶ Undocumented immigrants
- ▶ Young mobile persons
- ▶ Children
- ▶ Persons who are angry at and/or distrust the government
- ▶ LGBTQ persons

## HOW IS THE CENSUS PAID FOR?

The Census Bureau receives funding through the budgeting process in Congress. The budget for the Census Bureau goes through the Commerce, Science, Justice, and Related Agencies subcommittee in the Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate. The Census Bureau receives funding every year but funding amounts traditionally “ramp up” as the Decennial Census approaches. While some programs may allow budgets to “catch up” with greater investment at a later date, the Census Bureau cannot fund their work if funding levels are off schedule making their current and on-going funding needs urgent. Adequate funding is the only way to ensure the Bureau can test census questions and hire the appropriate staff to ensure a successful census process.