

Nonprofits, governments, for-profit businesses, and the public all rely on a fair, accurate, and complete census count to make decisions about the future. After years of chronic underfunding and the last-minute addition of a citizenship question, the 2020 Census is in danger of failing to satisfy the Constitutional mandate of counting every person in the country. It is imperative that Congress fully fund the 2020 Census and insist on the removal of a citizenship question.

Nonprofits and Our Communities Rely on Census Data

The U.S. Constitution mandates the decennial census, which is used to draw political districts (reapportionment), allocate \$800 billion in federal spending in the states, and provide economic and demographic data needed for nonprofit and business planning for the next ten years. Every element of the economy, every government, and every individual depend on it being done correctly so data are fair, accurate, and complete.

Nonprofits operate in every county and community in our country. Without proper data, nonprofits are unable to determine who and where the population is, how the population is shifting, where to site operations, or how to best allocate resources. If the data are wrong, there will be inequitable distribution of resources for basic community needs, such as education, food and income security, health care, housing, transportation, and much more. Flawed census data could mean underfunding communities, greater burdens on nonprofits to fill gaps in needs in those communities, and invalid business decisions about those needs.

The Challenges

As the U.S. Census Bureau notes, “The decennial census is the largest mobilization and operation conducted in the United States and requires years of research, planning and development of methods and infrastructure to ensure an accurate and complete count.”¹ **There is only one shot to get it right.** Yet major problems are brewing with the 2020 Census that could hurt every business, government, nonprofit, and person in America for more than a decade.

Funding Levels: The omnibus spending bill for Fiscal Year 2018 provided an \$1.34 billion increase for the Census Bureau, but this comes after years of underfunding. It is still not enough to ensure a fair, accurate, and complete count. Reliable commitments for requisite funding now and through the actual enumeration must be made.

New Approach Without Required Testing: For the first time in history, the census will be conducted primarily online. While many take the internet for granted, a digital divide exists today with 16 percent of all U.S. adults not using the internet.² Hard-to-count areas, by definition, are already

2020 Census: What Members of Congress can do?

- Provide adequate funding for the Census Bureau
- Proactively ensure the Census is conducted properly
- Remove the citizenship question

hard to reach, and the lack of online access will further lead to an unfair, inaccurate, and incomplete count. The switch from paper questionnaires to electronic methods also raises cybersecurity concerns as data breaches in the private and public sectors become more commonplace. While electronic methods of questioning may make practical sense, additional testing, safeguards, and precautions are needed. Yet, due to funding shortfalls and other challenges, the Census Bureau has had to cancel two scheduled tests and has little time left to get it right.

Citizenship Question Will Suppress Count: Any controversial question that may discourage full participation in the Census will result in flawed data and therefore should not be included on the questionnaire. The Census Bureau has previously provided research demonstrating that a question on a person’s citizenship status would discourage participation and has acknowledged that the impact “could be, in some communities, important.”³ Further, due to the enormity and importance of the Census, federal law dictates a strict process and timeline for questions to be added, protecting the integrity of the count and impeding unintended consequences. The citizenship question was added without regard for these protective measures and will lead to harmful undercounting.

The Ask

Will you vote for full funding for the 2020 Census and work to strip the citizenship question from the 2020 Census?

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¹ “About the Census,” U.S. Census Bureau (page last revised April 3, 2018) available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/about.html>.

² Americans’ Internet Access, Pew Research Center, June 15, 2015, available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/>.

³ “Cities Brace for Census With Trump’s Citizenship Question,” Talking Points Memo, April 24, 2018, available at <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/census-cities-preparation-citizenship-question>.