



Every Moment Counts

1990
2000
2010
2020
2030

New Jersey's Blueprint to Census Success in 2020 and Beyond

By Peter Chen, Coordinator for the Census 2020 NJ Coalition



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Introduction

In the 2020 Census, New Jersey recorded its highest self-response rate in 30 years. Almost 70 percent of households invited to complete the questionnaire did so, more than two points ahead of the national average and almost two points greater than the 2010 Census self-response rate.¹

When the U.S. Census Bureau announced the state total population counts in April 2021, New Jersey had 9,288,994 people, an increase of 5.7 percent or nearly 500,000 new residents compared to 2010. This was a faster growth rate than New York or Pennsylvania.² The 2020 Census count in New Jersey also outperformed estimates and projections based on the 2010 count.

But this success did not happen by accident. New Jersey's successful Census campaign required the extensive coordination of federal, state and local governments, as well as community-based organizations across the state. Years before Census mailers arrived at New Jersey homes, dedicated advocates began laying the groundwork to help ensure a complete count.

Because of the size and scope of the Census, it was recognized early on that no single organization or coalition could effectively carry out all the tasks necessary to achieve a successful complete count campaign. Thus, a statewide partnership was formed between four entities, colloquially referred to as the "four-legged stool": the New York Regional Office of the Census Bureau, the Census NJ 2020 Coalition of non-profit organizations, The Fund for New Jersey representing philanthropic partners, and the New Jersey Department of State, along with its Census grantees. This collaboration allowed the campaign to maximize partner contributions, more efficiently use resources and minimize duplication of effort. Nowhere was the importance of this collaboration clearer than during adjustments, pivots and redeployments of resources in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This statewide partnership and collaboration — never before seen in New Jersey — was central to the campaign's eventual success.

From the outset, New Jersey faced all the challenges that the Census was confronting nationally, including declining response rates to surveys, lower trust in government and low understanding of the Census's importance. In addition, the state is home to populations who are more likely to be excluded from or have low response rates to the Census, often described as "hard to count," including immigrants, rural residents, renters, seniors, college students, low-income residents, Black or Hispanic residents and children under age 5.

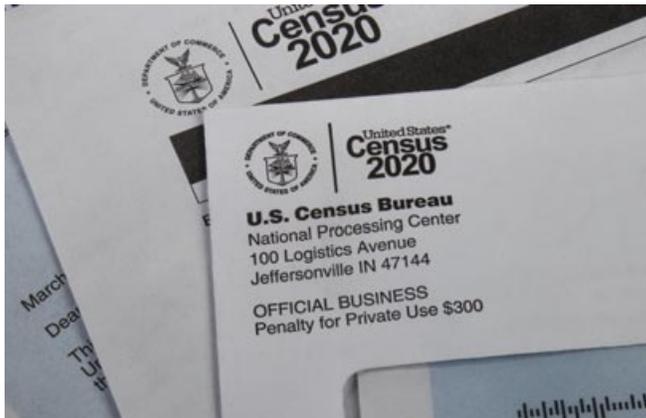
As a rapidly changing and diverse state, New Jersey has pockets of hard-to-count (HTC) populations requiring targeted outreach. Approximately 22 percent of New Jersey's population lived in an HTC area.³ Like many states, New Jersey's campaign relied on trusted messengers at the local level (such as local non-profits, community-based organizations, houses of worship, neighborhood leaders and elected officials) to spread the word and "Get Out The Count" (GOTC) to these HTC populations, building on existing trust.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on New Jersey's Census campaign cannot be overstated. The pandemic shifted deadlines, stopped Census workers from going into the field for a period of time and froze or cancelled in-person events that were planned as the backbone of the campaign. The pandemic's first wave also hit at the worst possible time for

the state, exactly at the moment when those in-person events were scheduled. Organizers had to quickly pivot to digital strategies, as well as focus on the few areas where in-person gathering still occurred.

In the end, New Jersey's extensive early planning, deep connections between different levels of government, committed local advocates and complete count committees helped to ensure a successful campaign into the final days of data collection. New Jersey was one of a handful of states to increase its self-response rate by 0.2 points on the final day of the Census — a testament to the continued messaging and outreach from New Jersey's Census advocates.⁴

This document preserves the record of how New Jersey's 2020 Census effort came to be, as well as the obstacles faced on the way to success. It also outlines lessons learned for future campaigns, especially for the 2030 Census.



Why the 2020 Census

As the 2020 Census approached, national civic and statistical organizations began ringing the alarm that its accuracy might be in jeopardy. The 2020 Census faced serious obstacles to success, as multiple trends and factors overlapped to make 2020 arguably the most challenging in history, including:

- Declining response rates to government surveys and polls over time,
- Obstacles to the online and phone-based response platforms,
- Declining trust in government,
- Last-minute Census changes and proposals by the Trump administration,
- Uncertainty in litigation created by proposed changes (citizenship, timeline),
- Uncertainty surrounding funding and staffing at Census Bureau headquarters, and
- The final curveball of the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns.

These factors were compounded by New Jersey's lack of a prior centralized Census outreach effort. In 2010, New Jersey received limited funds from the Census Bureau to help with the Census effort, but the Bureau took on the vast majority of the load, conducting the Census and providing the necessary resources. In the past, getting out the count was primarily a local effort, coordinated between local governments and the Census Bureau.

In 2020, those Census Bureau funds for states were not available, and Census Bureau federal funding threatened to go below originally anticipated levels. It became clear that for the 2020 Census, New Jersey would need to conduct a comprehensive, collaborative campaign. This was a campaign of firsts: the first statewide Complete Count Commission (CCC), the first major investment in Census outreach at a state or local level by state government or philanthropy and the first Census campaign to incorporate digital and technological outreach.

There were three initial motivations for New Jersey's heightened interest in the 2020 Census:

Political representation: Prior censuses had serious consequences for New Jersey. In 1990 and in 2010, New Jersey lost a congressional seat (and electoral vote) during reapportionment based on Census figures.⁵ In addition, legislative redistricting depends on population counts for municipalities, and people living in HTC areas (such as urban areas, rural areas, communities of color, etc.) across the state raised concerns that their voices would be inaccurately represented in the state and federal legislatures.

Funding, especially federal: Roughly \$45.8 billion in annual federal funding was guided by Census figures for New Jersey in FY2017.⁶ This figure includes \$24.7 billion in Medicare spending, \$9.4 billion for Medicaid and an additional \$11.7 billion for a wide range of health care, education, transportation, housing, community development, nutrition and social services programs. New Jersey ranks near the bottom of the country in federal funds it receives compared to federal taxes its residents pay.⁷ An accurate count of all New Jersey's residents is critical to ensuring that the nation's 11th most populous state receives a fairer share of federal investments, particularly for residents of its HTC communities. Additionally, individual cities may qualify for funding for specific federal or state grants based on total population, such as the Community Development Block Grant.

Accurate data: Data-driven decision-making has been a focus for New Jersey governments, businesses and non-profits, particularly in ensuring that resources are distributed efficiently and equitably. However, groups working on issues ranging from homelessness to health disparities noted that base Census data from prior years might be missing key demographics or populations, especially as New Jersey has experienced substantial population change and turnover.

A fourth reason for Census outreach surfaced as the campaign began in earnest — namely the importance of basic civic engagement for populations considered hard to count. The same factors that have led to low Census response rates (declining trust in government, fear about data collection, low understanding of civic infrastructure) also meant that many groups contacted as part of Census outreach had felt left out of participation in civic life, such as voting, participating in public meetings and writing to elected officials. The decennial Census serves as a rare opportunity when every resident must be counted, regardless of citizenship, age, previous incarceration, immigration status or other qualification. This provided an opportunity for civic education and engagement for groups historically excluded or marginalized from community decision-making.

Against this backdrop, New Jersey engaged in the most far-reaching and successful Census outreach campaign in its history.

Timeline

2017:

Three years before the 2020 Census, the typical federal machinery of the Census had already begun to move. Notably, the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program had begun to recruit state, county and municipal governments to participate. Some counties declined to participate, as did a number of communities with substantial HTC populations.⁸ In New Jersey, this process was managed by the New Jersey State Data Center, housed in the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

At the federal level, warning signs were already on the horizon. As part of the 2014 budget deal, Congress required that the 2020 Census could not cost more than the 2010 count, even without adjusting for inflation. Test runs of Spanish language and remote/rural data collection were delayed and eventually scrapped, as were messaging tests for outreach to HTC communities. The concerns about funding also led to the resignation of the U.S. Census director, who had been anticipated as the leader during the 2020 Census cycle in May 2017.

National funders and foundations began to mobilize philanthropic engagement for the 2020 Census. The Democracy Funders Collaborative's Census Subgroup began meeting in 2015. The Funders Census Initiative, a committee of the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation, had already been convening in 2016 to plan for 2020. The Fund for New Jersey connected with both groups in 2017 and became an active participant in ongoing meetings. Notably, the National Association for Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) took a leadership role in educating funders about the need to begin funding Census outreach.

2018:

The state began laying groundwork for the targeted activities in 2020 more extensively. The machinery of the 2020 Census kicked into higher gear, with the hiring of Partnership Specialists by the Census Bureau and the beginnings of outreach to local community groups.

In New Jersey, The Fund for New Jersey's role was critical in meeting with state government officials and with other grant-makers to communicate the importance of the Census and prepare a financial base for non-profit organizations to support Census outreach in 2019 and 2020. Strategically identified partners included statewide philanthropic organizations, as well as funders who focus on specific issues or geographic regions. In addition, The Fund for New Jersey began to make grants to non-profit organizations focused on HTC populations and/or civic engagement, such as the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ), Wind of the Spirit (WotS) and Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ). These non-profit organizations began meeting with elected officials, local community groups and others in their networks to begin raising the issue of the Census. They worked to advocate for the State to create its own statewide Complete Count Committee, as other states had begun to do, and to designate state funding to support outreach efforts.

State government began to elevate the issue as well with the creation of the Complete Count Commission and the anticipated creation of grants to support this effort. The Secretary of State's office was designated as the point agency, headed by Secretary of State Tahesha Way. The Secretary of State's office staffed the Commission and prepared the State's official Census outreach strategy, which included the framework of a broad based multimedia campaign, coordination with other state agencies, development of messaging strategy and a grassroots organizing program. Although in-person meetings would not begin until January 2019, the Secretary of State's office began planning for additional staff to handle the anticipated Census outreach.

One notable component of advocacy was the availability of the HTC data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the development of the HTC Census tract designation using 2010 response rate data from the City University of New York (CUNY) Center for Urban Research.² ACNJ utilized these data to create maps of each state legislative district and each congressional district to show HTC communities' locations and demographics. It also created statewide snapshots of the enumeration challenges related to African American communities, Latinx communities, Asian communities and children under 5 years old ([See appendix for fact sheets](#)).

Key events:

■ March 2018 —

The Fund for New Jersey planned to begin funding organizations in 2018 to work on Census outreach, targeting specific HTC groups. The Fund approached ACNJ with a proposal to map HTC tracts in New Jersey communities. HTC tracts were defined as census tracts in the bottom ten percent of response rate in 2010 by the CUNY Mapping Service. ACNJ began a working relationship with CUNY and its existing data sources on Census geography and HTC characteristics.¹⁰

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross announced his decision to add a new question to the 2020 Census asking whether the person is a citizen of the United States. The "citizenship question" was immediately challenged in court. This question would extend a long shadow over the entire Census outreach process.

■ April 2018 —

State legislators began taking interest in the 2020 Census as national groups, such as the National Urban League and NALEO, began elevating the issue of the Census at national gatherings.

■ May 2018 —

The Fund for New Jersey hosted a one-day meeting for non-profits and foundations to learn about Census 2020, why engagement was important for the people of NJ and how organizations could get involved. The Fund also created one-pagers for non-profits and for foundations.

■ June 2018 —

Senator Ronald Rice sponsored a bill to create a New Jersey Complete Count Commission, charged with encouraging full participation in the 2020 Census. A companion bill was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblywomen Mila Jasey, Yvonne Lopez and Shavonda Sumter.



■ **Mid-2018 —**

Partnership staff began for the 2020 cycle for the Census Bureau.

■ **August 2018 —**

The Complete Count Commission bill was signed into law by the Governor, including \$500,000 for operations, hiring of staff, organization of meetings and support for the commission.

The NJISJ hired a coordinator for their New Jersey Counts program to begin convening what would become the statewide non-profit coalition (Census 2020 NJ).

■ **September 2018 —**

The Paterson Alliance held one of the first Census awareness events, building the beginnings of the cross-sector teams necessary for success: Mayor Andre Sayegh, NJISJ, ACNJ and a Census Bureau representative. This process was later replicated in other municipalities and counties across NJ.

The NJISJ held regular calls with non-profit partners working on the Census, including ACNJ, Make the Road New Jersey and WotS.

The Fund for New Jersey continued presenting to other funders, both statewide and locally, requesting them to incorporate Census outreach funding into their 2019 and 2020 budgets.

■ **October 2018 —**

Partnership specialists began working for the Census Bureau.

CCCs began forming in key HTC areas, such as Newark and Paterson.



2019:



The year 2019 signaled the rapid ramp-up of Census activity across the State. In January alone, the Complete Count Commission held its first hearing, NJISJ held a planning session to review its strategic plan for the non-profit coalition and ACNJ held a conference on the undercount of young children in New Jersey.

The Census Bureau kicked its efforts into higher gear, opening its area offices across the state and began recruitment for key roles, particularly partnership specialists. Although there were challenges hiring because of the robust economy, especially for language specialties, the Bureau broadly met its targets. The recruiting effort also served as an opportunity to engage community-based groups, houses of worship and municipal governments in Census efforts, using job fairs at community sites as a hook.

The Secretary of State's office and the Complete Count Commission also began moving towards higher levels of activity. The Commission held its statutorily required three hearings and in June, released its report to the Governor and Legislature.¹¹ An extensive multimedia campaign was developed, as well as a number of large awareness-building events across the state, including a statewide tour on April 1, 2019 dubbed "One Year Out."

The non-profit coalition began taking a clearer form, with ACNJ transitioning to lead coordination responsibilities, while other organizations identified key HTC populations as their targets: Black/African American residents and urban centers (NJISJ), Hispanic/Latinx residents and Spanish-speaking residents (Latino Action Network Foundation), immigrants (Make the Road New Jersey and Wind of the Spirit) and Asian-American and Pacific Islander residents (Asian American Federation). The League of Women Voters New Jersey also joined the effort, bringing its longstanding expertise in civic education and engagement.

The NJISJ took the lead on advocating for \$9 million in the state budget to assist with Census outreach, roughly targeting one dollar for each New Jersey resident. Other non-profit organizations used their various connections with key legislators to ensure that the expanded funding was included. Although a small commitment compared with the enormous federal funding at stake, this money would eventually be critical to complete count efforts. These funds would also serve as the backbone of support for community groups and non-profits through the unpredictable 2020 pandemic-affected calendar.

The Fund for New Jersey served two key roles — aggregating funding for the Census into pooled groups of funds and encouraging other funders to make their own grants in support of the broad statewide plan. The Council of New Jersey Grantmakers, for example, dedicated its 2019 conference to the Census.

Key events:

■ January 2019 —

- First Complete Count Commission public hearing.
- ACNJ Young Children Undercount Conference at Rutgers-New Brunswick.
- NJISJ planning session for Census 2020 NJ Coalition.
- National message testing results released to support local communications efforts.

■ February 2019-March 2019 —

- Second Complete Count Commission public hearing.
- Recruitment of new organizations to Census outreach effort.
- New CCCs.
- Census Bureau continued opening staffing area offices in NJ.

■ March 2019 —

- Third Complete Count Commission public hearing.

■ April 2019 —

- One Year Out Kickoff tour across state.
- Amicus brief for Department of Commerce v. New York (challenging the inclusion of a question asking about respondent citizenship) submitted on behalf of foundations and philanthropy-serving organizations. The Fund for New Jersey contributed to the brief and signed on.

■ **May 2019 —**

Beginning of regularly scheduled “four-legged stool” calls with Census Bureau regional office, Secretary of State, The Fund for New Jersey and Census 2020 NJ Coalition.

Newark Census planning conference.

Addition of Asian American Federation (NY) to non-profit coalition.

Monthly calls for immigrant and Black/African American Census groups began.

■ **June 2019 —**

Council of New Jersey Grantmakers’ Census annual conference focused on Census 2020.

U.S. Supreme Court blocked implementation of citizenship question.

NJ organizations held press conference to celebrate U.S. Supreme Court victory.

Complete Count Committees formed in most NJ hard-to-count municipalities.

NJ approved budget for FY2020 included \$9 million specifically for Census 2020 outreach.

■ **July-September 2019 —**

Funder-based and non-profit-based regional Census presentations continued.

Training for ethnic and community-based media in partnership with Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University.

Private foundation grants totaling ~\$400,000 provided to non-profits in key HTC areas and covering specific HTC demographic groups (e.g., Latinx, immigrants, Asian-American, Black/African American).

■ **October 2019 —**

Census jobs recruitment campaign kicked off.

NJ organizations, municipalities and counties coordinated job fairs across the state.

ACNJ released toolkit of resources for Census outreach.

■ **November 2019 —**

Job fairs continued statewide.

Local engagement events with county and local officials.

Planning phases for GOTC efforts.

■ **December 2019 —**

Continued “train-the-trainer” sessions for local officials and community members.

Launch of several local Census campaigns.

2020:

The bulk of planning came to fruition in 2020. Millions of dollars in grants flowed to county and local governments and non-profit organizations across the state in order to build up staffing and infrastructure for GOTC efforts. But many of those plans were upended by COVID-19 ([The Impact of COVID-19](#), p. 14).

Nonetheless, after initial hiccups, the state's Census advocates were able to pivot to a digital strategy, followed by an aggressive push for in-person events and Census completion once limited reopening began in July and August.

Key events:

■ January 2020 –

A \$5 million state-funded Census grant program launched. A total of 69 grants were awarded to 52 community-based non-profits across the state and 17 counties. The funds flowed primarily to HTC areas of the state. At the county level, funds were often subgranted to HTC municipalities and to other non-profits.

Complete Count Commission/Secretary of State staff conducted GOTC Census Organizing Training in January and early February that resulted in almost 250 advocates, community leaders and non-profit personnel being trained.

The Complete Count Commission/Secretary of State staff created and shared a NJ Census 2020 Organizing Toolkit.

There was a final coordinated effort between the Census Bureau, local community groups and municipalities around job fairs and hiring in HTC communities at the end of January.

Texting campaigns through non-profit partners began, with focuses on English and Spanish language outreach.

The Census Bureau ad campaign launched with amplification through local CCCs and Census coalition networks.

A Census Kiosk guidance document was distributed to community groups, counties, libraries and municipal governments.

■ February 2020 —

Non-profit and community-based organizations held organizing workshops for community members in HTC communities.

Municipal and county leaders hosted Census town halls.

Groups across the state laid the groundwork for hundreds of events in March and April, such as in-person Census completion at after-school events, food pantries and houses of worship.

Roughly \$380,000 in grants were allocated for local non-profit organizations through pooled philanthropic fund for GOTC activities, with an additional \$120,000 in funding for technological support for Census kiosks or tablets, devices, or internet access to complete the Census.

■ **March 2020 —**

See: The Impact of COVID-19, p. 14.

Large in-person events were scheduled to kick off the Census but many were cancelled in early March.

Many organizations shifted to virtual activities, Census Selfies and other at-home Census outreach.

Many non-profits, houses of worship and libraries closed, removing key in-person Census completion sites.

All non-profit coalitions, local grantees, CCCs and other organizations promoting Census were called upon to participate in outreach.

■ **April-June 2020 —**

Most Census activities remained dormant while many organizations transitioned to providing direct support as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis deepened.

Digital action weekends and local days of action were held during May, including digital events, Facebook Live events and “friends and family” projects encouraging calling five friends to tell them about the 2020 Census.

The Secretary of State’s office held weekly social media themes, sharing materials for partners to promote.

Community-based organizations received rapid-response grants for limited in-person outreach.

Local non-profits, the statewide non-profit coalition and local elected officials conducted outreach to NJ’s congressional delegation advocating for the extension of key Census deadlines to allow for an accurate count.

Census materials were distributed to CCCs across NJ through partnership with the New York Regional Office and Partnership Specialists.

■ **July 2020 —**

Roughly \$200,000 in “rapid response” grants from remaining philanthropic funds were directed to organizations with the capacity for in-person outreach in areas underperforming in comparison to their 2010 response rates.

PUSH Week events across the state at the end of July and early August restarted in-person Census assistance and outreach efforts.

Census organizers developed a rapid advocacy response to the Trump Administration’s memorandum to exclude undocumented persons from 2020 Census count.

NJ Assembly Committee on Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations held a special hearing on issues relating to the 2020 Census, resulting in commitment from members to spread the word about the Census in their own districts.

■ **August-October 2020 —**

Local non-profits, municipalities, counties and the Secretary of State continued to host and promote PUSH Week events.

The Secretary of State developed and deployed car caravan events and traveling billboard events throughout NJ.

Census kiosks resumed in many locations, including pairing with food giveaways, donation events, gift card raffles and other events to encourage participation and to reach hardest-to-count residents.

Houses of worship hosted in-person Census completion events after reopening.

Creative events popped up, including food truck carnivals, ice cream trucks, back-to-school supply giveaways and motor vehicle commission partnerships. Many of these events utilized the Census Bureau's Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA).

COVID-19 testing sites across the state began to host MQA or non-profit/municipal assistance for the completion of the Census.

Volunteers started in-person canvassing of neighborhoods with low response rates, with targeting provided by the Secretary of State and State Data Center, as well as Census Hard-to-Count Maps data.

Final \$70,000 in rapid-response grants were distributed to local non-profits for a final push for GOTC, with the focus on in-person outreach.

Advocacy efforts continued at the federal level for extended deadlines.

Communications continued with CCCs and local Census advocates about the rapidly changing deadlines and how to continue the Census push until the very last day.



Roles and Responsibilities

Census Bureau New York Regional Office: Regional Office leadership was responsible for all aspects of the 2020 Census data collection in New Jersey, including partnership, mobile questionnaire assistance, hiring, group quarters, service-based enumeration and countless other concurrent operations. The regional office was a key resource, providing materials, in-person assistance, presentations, troubleshooting and acting as a point of contact for many organizations working on Census outreach. In particular, Regional Director Jeff T. Behler set a tone of cooperation and transparency with all partners, from state government down to the smallest church or non-profit. As soon as information was available to the public, the regional office staff communicated quickly with partners to get the word out during the shifting timelines over the summer of 2020.

Secretary of State's Office: The Secretary of State spearheaded state government efforts to encourage a complete count in the 2020 Census. Their activities included:

- Hiring full-time staff to develop and support an outreach campaign, including specialists who covered geographic regions and liaised with county and local CCCs to coordinate outreach and support;
- Developing and launching a statewide multimedia marketing campaign targeting communities with high HTC populations and key language and demographic groups that may have been missed by the national campaign;
- Distributing millions in grant funding to county governments and non-profit organizations to support complete count efforts for HTC areas and populations;
- Coordinating with state departments to distribute information and encourage Census participation, including the Motor Vehicle Commission, the Department of Human Services (which coordinates most social services) and the Department of Education;
- Staffing the Complete Count Commission, assisting in the writing of reports, administration of meetings, coordination of testimony and other logistical support; and
- Coordinating technical assistance for grantees through the State Data Center and the regularly updated Census response rate data to target HTC Census tracts and shift resources accordingly.

New Jersey Complete Count Commission: The Commission, which served as the state-wide CCC, was formed by legislation in 2018. The Commission was appointed in late 2018 and began meeting in 2019, with a final report created by June 2019 ([Appendix p. 30](#)). Its 27 members included legislators and government staff, local elected officials and representatives from a diverse array of stakeholders. The Commission's report formed the basis of New Jersey's complete count plan executed over the course of 2019 and 2020. A full list of the Commission's membership is available on their website: <https://nj.gov/state/njcounts.shtml>.

Census 2020 NJ Coalition: The Census 2020 NJ Coalition was a collection of non-profit organizations, headed by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice in 2018-19, and Advocates for Children of New Jersey from 2019-20. A core group of members, each funded by the pooled Census philanthropic fund, met monthly and eventually twice a month, in order to coordinate messaging, identify concerns, increase community responses, plan for GOTC activities and provide feedback to the Census Bureau about identified or emerging issues. The Coalition also took the lead on advocacy for Census-related issues at the state and federal level, advocating for the creation of the Complete Count Commission, the eventual \$9.5 million in state funding for Census outreach and local legislative leadership for Census outreach at the district level. At the federal level, members of the Coalition participated in litigation surrounding the Census questionnaire, while the group worked with the New Jersey congressional delegation to support full funding and an accurate count.

The Fund for New Jersey: The Fund for New Jersey was among the first in the state to recognize the importance of the 2020 Census and began coordinating and convening in 2017. The Fund for New Jersey reached out to New Jersey non-profit organizations, including those that would later form the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, to gauge interest in Census organizing. The Fund encouraged other philanthropic organizations to donate to pooled funds or provide direct funding to organizations for Census-related activities, eventually raising \$2.4 million from nearly 20 New Jersey foundations, including national funders Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Census Equity Fund. This funding was invaluable to community-based and non-profit organizations, particularly those in a coordinating role. State grant funding often went to organizations with on-the-ground direct services, but coordinating a large statewide effort across multiple sectors and geographies required extensive staff time and paid enormous dividends.

County and local governments: County governments had opportunities to apply directly to state government for funding, whereas local governments had to rely on private philanthropy or county subgrants. Although each county handled funding differently, most that received grants ended up subgranting to municipalities, non-profits or other organizations. Each county developed a plan for distributing its Census grant funding, as well as how to use government resources to encourage a complete count. Local governments often had more “boots on the ground,” using existing employees to reach out to community members and leveraging relationships with businesses and houses of worship. Counties and local governments also coordinated with the Census Bureau through the LUCA and job fair hiring processes.

Community-based organizations and non-profits: Some non-profit and community groups received grants through state or philanthropic funding. Other organizations became involved in CCCs at the local or county level, engaging on a volunteer basis to help get the word out about the Census. Because non-profit organizations often directly serve HTC populations (such as people experiencing homelessness, households with lower incomes, renters, people with disabilities, etc.), they were able to build on existing relationships and send messaging to people who already trusted them.

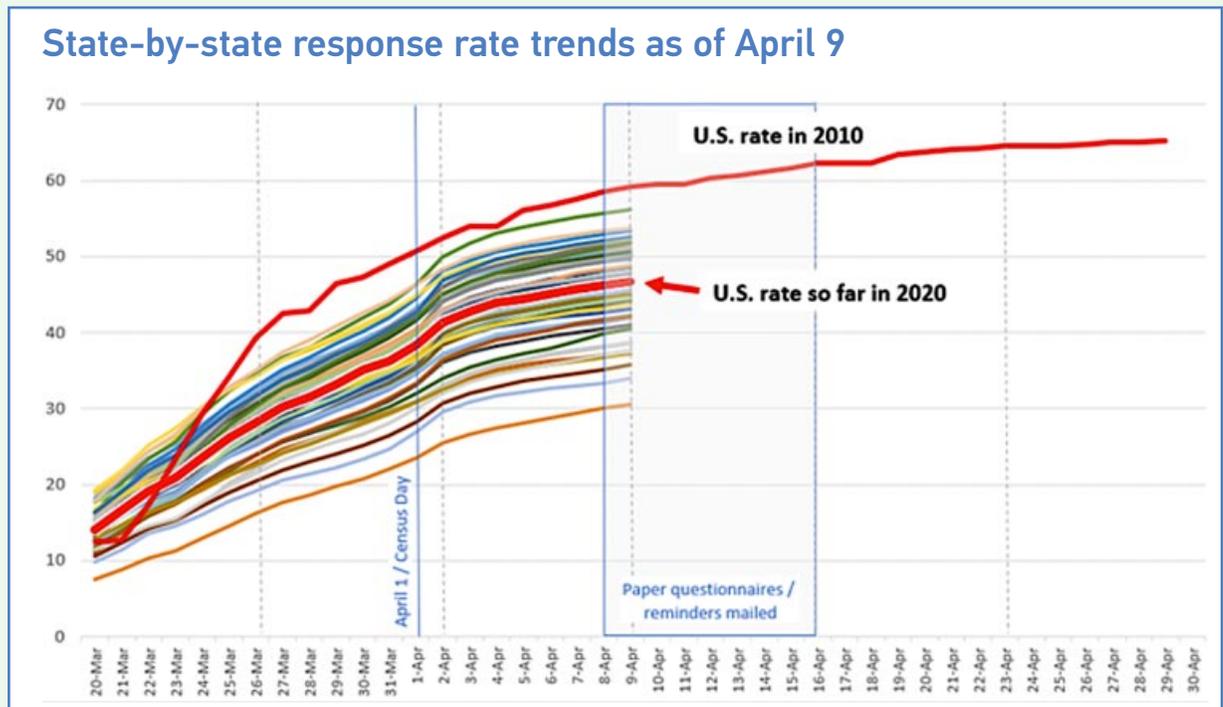
Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic threw the 2020 Census into even further chaos, and the particular impact on New Jersey was pronounced, especially in the early stages of Census outreach in March 2020.

The flooding of media and government attention on COVID-19 at exactly the time of planned blitzes of advertising for the 2020 Census hampered planned outreach efforts. Luckily, flexibility in grant making from both the State and foundations allowed non-profit organizations, counties and local governments to hold onto funding planned for in-person outreach, but many organizations had already made substantial outlays for planned in-person events.

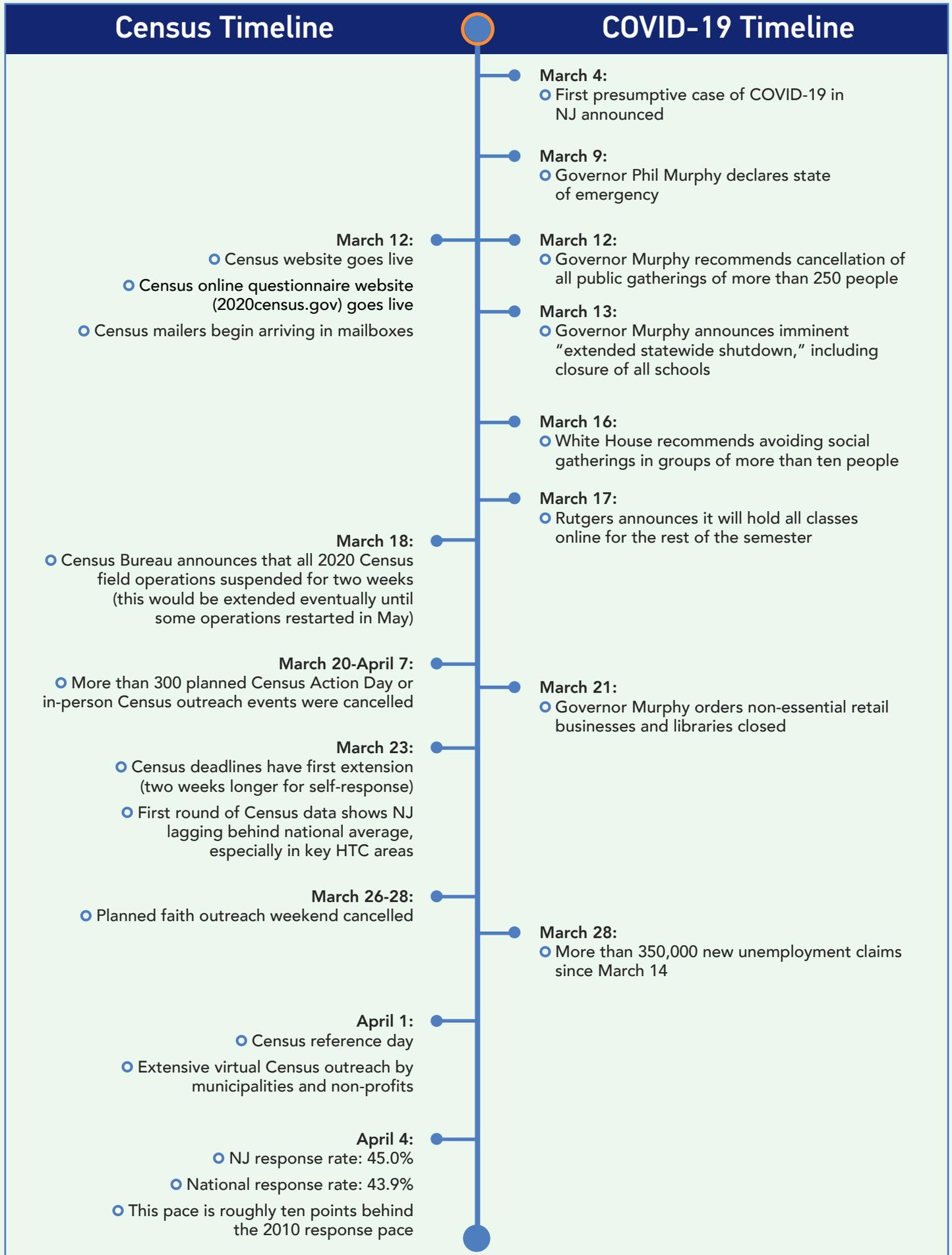
A large portion of the GOTC plan was disrupted in March with the onset of COVID-19. Well-laid plans, including the deployment of 700 census support kiosks, had to be set aside. In rapid fashion, it was necessary to reorganize and refocus on virtual activities in response to the pandemic. In June, as the state reopened, there was a need to shift once again to create modified in-person activities that were necessary in HTC areas. These included things like community car caravans to publicize the Census and outdoor Census support kiosks. The staff of each of the members of the “four-legged stool” were actively involved at the grassroots level in supporting these efforts.

The following graph from the CUNY Center for Urban Research shows the dramatically lower response rates in 2020 compared to 2010 during the same time periods, especially in the month of March leading up to April 1 (Census Day).



Census Timeline

COVID-19 Timeline



Operational changes came as a result of the pandemic as well. The Census Bureau repeatedly extended deadlines for self-response, suspended Update-Leave operations (when Census workers drop off paper invitations at front doors), delayed Non-Response Follow-Up door-knocking data collection operations until July 16, 2020, and rescheduled its other count operations such as group quarters enumeration, service-based enumeration and the outdoor overnight count (for people experiencing homelessness).

These adjustments eventually meant more time for outreach to be conducted as the state began to reopen in June, especially in-person door-to-door outreach before Census workers went back into the field for Non-Response Follow-Up.

These adjustments also required extensive communication with local groups doing Census outreach to ensure that accurate information regarding when and where activities would take place was timely distributed.

Additionally, the pandemic altered budget windows for the state-funded grants, as well as flexibility on the part of private foundations, to ensure that the funds were available to keep outreach going deep into the extended Census window. This ended up paying dividends as New Jersey continued to extend its Census outreach deep into the Non-Response Follow-Up period.

One key lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic was the importance of in-person outreach. Digital strategies paid off, especially targeted approaches, such as online events or webinars with existing partners and community members or paying for targeted Facebook ads for specific ZIP codes or neighborhoods. But these strategies were not sufficient to get to the hardest-to-count residents, who were not going to be motivated to Census completion through digital nudges. One-on-one conversations or group settings with a charismatic and established community leader could convert hesitant or low-information residents to Census completion in a way that large scale digital outreach could not. Only after the resumption of in-person events towards the end of July did New Jersey start to see the sustained growth in response rate that continued to the very last day of data collection in October.



Successful Strategies and Lessons Learned



Strategic Coordination: Perhaps no lesson was more important than the need for coordination and collaboration. The Census is full of moving parts, not to mention an enormous hiring operation with hundreds of thousands of employees. Coordinating an outreach effort required hundreds of Census partners, thousands of events and countless volunteers across the state.

A regular coordination call between the Census Bureau regional office, the Secretary of State's office, The Fund for New Jersey and the Census 2020 NJ non-profit coalition helped promote transparency as well as the sharing of ideas and information. These calls helped spread the word about creative Census solutions and elevated community and local concerns to the Census Bureau. These calls were supplemented by members of each group also participating in local Census complete count efforts in various communities, helping to connect local and statewide efforts.

When local officials, non-profits, community-based organizations and Census Bureau representatives were on the same page, coordinated efforts to hold events, distribute materials and educate the public were effective. This level of coordination often required external funding efforts or dedicated staff from the county, city or a local non-profit tasked with emailing agendas and guests, developing action plans and holding stakeholders accountable. Local CCCs were the backbone and vehicle for the entire New Jersey census effort, but success required much more than just having them in place.

In-Person Advocacy: The COVID-19 pandemic revealed just how important in-person outreach and advocacy are for an effective Census outreach effort. There is no substitute for in-person conversations, especially for the HTC populations across the state. This adage is true for advocates as well; in-person trainings tended to yield substantially more buy-in and response from audiences than virtual trainings.

In-person advocacy also permitted more volume in completion of questionnaires. People standing in line for food distribution or COVID-19 tests could fill out their questionnaires while waiting. This suggests that large-scale events such as school assemblies, sporting events and in-person services at houses of worship may be effective sites for mass Census completion under normal circumstances.

High-engagement activities accounted for the best results. Examples of such activities include community car caravans and outdoor Census Kiosk events. In those settings, completing the Census with others from their community helped people feel both safe and empowered. The idea of 'doing this together' is a theme that resonated, particularly in the home stretch of the campaign.

Digital Strategies: With the pivot to digital in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic-related shutdowns, Census partners and advocates ramped up their usage of online and digital platforms. Creative approaches, from Census dance parties and book readings to Census virtual kiosks and Zoom telethons, helped ensure that Census outreach did not stop when in-person contact did. However, these approaches were not uniformly effective, and more investigation will be needed into which approaches worked best. There was digital saturation during the key Census period, when every organization pivoted to email blasts and Facebook Live events. What Census advocates found most helpful, though, whether it was text banking, webinars or digital video contests, was outreach to groups already familiar and responsive, rather than new audiences. Finding the right WhatsApp or text chain groups was critical, and often required preexisting knowledge of communities and information sharing. It is difficult to predict exactly what 2030's digital landscape will look like, but it seems likely that trusted preexisting relationships will be the key to digital outreach then and now.

Communications: The most effective communications were often the simplest — breaking down the complexities of the Census to the basics of completing the form. Additionally, communications that could be easily adapted or conducted were helpful for spurring local communities to action. For example, pre-made PowerPoints or templates with blanks for logos and local municipality names helped local groups give information to their service population quickly and easily, without needing additional technical know-how. Similarly, state packages of messaging, talking points and shareable social media posts helped bolster digital advocacy when many organizations had limited capacity.

Timeline/Planning: New Jersey's relatively early planning process compared to other states helped to ensure that the 2020 outreach was successful. The foresight of Senator Rice and Assemblywomen Jasey, Lopez and Sumter to create the Complete Count Commission in 2018 served as the impetus for additional organizing, especially at the state level. Early planning with local groups and municipalities also helped enable foundations and municipalities to budget for Census outreach. By beginning meetings with a growing group of non-profits in 2018, New Jersey's coalition ensured that the Census was a top issue and circulated information to soften the ground for more communications in 2019 and 2020. Additionally, trusted relationships for local communities and Census organizers started early; partnerships built in 2018 endured through 2020.

Recommendations for 2030

Overall

- **Start early!** An early start helped give New Jersey a necessary boost, but all stakeholders agreed that an even earlier start to planning would have helped ensure a more robust Census outreach effort. Every stage of the process should be shifted earlier, especially getting the word out about the Census to community leaders. Small delays created by government bureaucracy, funding calendars and obligations and existing organizational responsibilities meant that planning and coordination tasks took longer than originally planned. Something as simple as a snow cancellation of a Complete Count Commission meeting could shift timelines down the road. The preparation timeline should shift earlier with a stronger push for “official” activities starting at least four years out from Census Day 2030, especially for the creation of CCCs and initial grants for Census advocacy planning.

Timeframe	Activities
2021-22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recap Census 2020 and spread data releases as available to community groups, municipalities, etc. ● Create Office of State Demographer and create permanent Census staff at Secretary of State’s office.
2023-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assign limited partnership staff to cover New Jersey, maintain relationships with successful Census partners, and begin following up with communities with low response rate in 2020. ● Funders should begin civic engagement strategy to fund grassroots engagement work at local level in low-response rate areas. ● Begin drafting 2030 Strategic Outreach Plan.
2024-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preliminary Census outreach plan to be released, with recommendations for budget and scope of 2030 Census outreach. ● Initial presentations to county, local municipal leaders about Census 2030, plans for rollout, impact of 2020 count, etc. to lay groundwork for grant funding in 2030 cycle. ● Identification of key stakeholders in each county, HTC area and population/demographic group to begin mapping out key contacts for 2030 outreach. ● Local Update of Census Addresses Operation (LUCA) marketing campaign to begin for local communities to participate.

Continued on following page

Timeframe	Activities
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pass Complete Count Commission legislation to create Commission in 2027, not 2028. ● Commission to hold meetings and release report. ● FY2028 budget to include funding for Census hub organizations in key HTC areas to begin staffing CCCs and educating the public, as well as building relationships with Census Bureau. ● Small grants for community-based organizations in specific HTC areas to conduct address canvassing to update LUCA files for sharing with Census Bureau. ● Planning grants from foundations to trusted messengers in HTC communities to begin building framework of who needs to be included in CCC and complete count efforts.
2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Census Bureau partnership specialists build CCCs in key HTC communities. ● Local funders convene CCCs with schools, municipalities, local non-profits, etc. ● Development of in-language outreach materials for top-most-spoken NJ languages for limited-English-proficient households. ● RFPs for larger two-year state grants to counties and local non-profits for planning events, educational efforts and outreach to key messengers.
2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop multilingual multiplatform media outreach campaign for HTC populations, especially non-English media. ● Partner with Census Bureau on hiring efforts, especially for non-English-speaking and HTC population representation. ● Extensive educational efforts through schools, child care, colleges and libraries.
2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Major media campaign. ● GOTC effort with substantial numbers of MQAs at sites across the state. ● Large-scale “mega” events to collect large numbers of Census responses. ● Direct door-to-door outreach during self-response before Census fieldworkers. ● Activation of non-profit community with funded grantees as a hub.

- **Reserve more time to develop local relationships.** Despite strong coordination efforts at the state level, local partnerships varied based on local leadership, interest level and existing infrastructure of non-profit or community-based organizations. New Jersey’s patchwork of hundreds of municipalities often meant hyperlocal outreach to build trust with HTC communities. This depth of engagement required a longer timeframe.

 - More permanent partnership staff could help maintain some key relationships with specific partners, rather than restarting the process every ten years.
 - Civic engagement infrastructure for hard-to-count areas and communities will require more funding and support, from both state and non-profit sources.

- **Trusted messenger outreach is important, but trust must be earned.** Many organizations, local elected officials, faith leaders and volunteers who considered themselves “trusted” messengers nonetheless described the difficulties of persuading hesitant and reluctant residents to complete the Census. The Census’s “trusted messenger” outreach strategy for getting out the count was an important and effective one, but only if that trust was preexisting. Trust must be built and strengthened over time, rather than assumed or rushed. Eroding trust in government makes it all the more important to develop stronger civic engagement, listen closely to community concerns and address them, in order to show the tangible benefits of the Census during non-decennial Census years.

- **Build on Census engagement to encourage more civic engagement broadly.** Initially, the Census work highlighted to many groups working at the local level how little civic engagement exists for HTC populations. Historically much civic engagement work has focused on voting. But many HTC populations either cannot vote (noncitizens, people under 18) or have been disengaged or excluded from the voting process. Especially for groups with low trust in government at any level, the need for longer conversations and in-depth outreach goes beyond the Census.

As the Census campaign progressed, organizational infrastructure along with an increased sense of community began to take shape across the state. There is now a nascent statewide collaborative coalition of governmental and non-profit organizations that can be activated to address future important issues that could, if nurtured, have a significant and lasting effect.

- **Strengthen language services and translation, especially for common languages in New Jersey.** New Jersey’s diverse population continues to require even more language skills than in past censuses. Recent Census data suggests that more than 30 percent of New Jersey households speak a language other than English at home, the fourth-highest percentage nationally after California, Texas and New Mexico.¹² Although Spanish-language materials were in high demand, Census advocates received requests for materials in Turkish, Bengali, Urdu, regional dialects of Arabic and Haitian Creole. Often there was a mismatch or short supply of language materials, enumerators, partnership specialists or non-profit organization representatives when presenting to particular groups. Arranging appropriate groups and potentially contracting with non-profits or small businesses to provide translation of materials could be helpful in the 2030 cycle.

- **Differentiate messaging for HTC groups.** Although the “safe, easy, and important” messaging was effective for many, for HTC groups who are hesitant to respond, an approach that admits past failings (e.g., Japanese internment, differential undercounts, race/ethnicity category disputes) can build trust. The one-size-fits-all messaging did not always resonate with groups that were distrustful of government. The Census outreach campaign focused on “trusted messengers” to deliver the message, but did not have a clear strategy for how to convince trusted messengers to carry the burden of convincing their communities to participate in the Census. Often, such messengers were concerned about how the government might use Census data or how their community would actually benefit from Census completion. A special set of messaging and strategies must be developed for people and communities who require more persuasion.
- **When focusing on how easy the Census is to complete, provide the questionnaire itself.** One of the most common pieces of feedback we received was that showing residents the relatively simple physical questionnaire made them much less resistant to completion. The online form required clicking all the way through to complete, making the process seem indefinite. When residents saw the information they had to submit was even less invasive than a bank, a health care provider, a school or a social media site, they were more willing to respond. A number of advocates noted that the lack of availability of hard-copy forms made this process more challenging, although sample questionnaires were available on the Census Bureau’s website. Making the questionnaire tangible reduced HTC resident anxiety and fear about a potentially intimidating government form.
- **Develop an even more robust set of media resources for HTC groups, especially non-English speakers and immigrants.** There were, in effect, two different census advertising campaigns in New Jersey. One was carried out by the Census Bureau and the other by the state. The Census Bureau’s media campaign was aligned with the media market that already heavily relies on New York and Philadelphia regional markets. Although the Bureau’s plan did include ethnic outlets, there were gaps in HTC coverage, particularly in non-English speaking and immigrant areas. The state intentionally mounted a media campaign more focused on the ethnic populations of HTC areas. The state’s advertising campaign — deploying varied tools including social media ads, bus ads, billboards, radio and television ads, and the successful traveling Census billboard truck — was more targeted to local and non-English media and served to help fill the aforementioned gaps. It became clear that different groups may get information from Facebook groups, YouTube, international satellite TV channels, local free papers and private text conversations on apps such as WeChat or WhatsApp. For the 2030 Census, organizers will need to be even more prepared with information that will help us be targeted and effective. To that end, a more comprehensive media survey is needed of HTC populations in New Jersey, including where they get their news and what sources can be leveraged for public communications.

- **Fight misinformation early.** The Census Bureau’s [fraud page](#) was helpful in identifying misinformation and debunking it. Yet fighting misinformation often felt like a game of whack-a-mole, with new myths popping up as quickly as the debunking facts went out. This recommendation goes hand-in-hand with the prior media landscape recommendation. Without knowing how communities are spreading potential misinformation, it is difficult to “prebunk” with accurate information through trusted sources.
- **Provide digital materials as modifiable templates, not PDFs.** This rather technical recommendation was universal feedback from Census advocates on the ground. Tailoring materials to individual groups was important throughout the process, whether including logos, local phone numbers, more representative stock photos, etc. PDFs were difficult for groups to modify, especially with limited technical resources. Flexible templates in programs people were likely to have (Word, PowerPoint, online platforms like Canva) appeared to work better for rapid distribution and community engagement. Although this means loss of message control in how materials may be modified, the “trusted messenger” model requires trust both ways, especially when local community groups are leveraging their relationships in order to get out the count.

Census Bureau

- **Continue Partnership activities during off-cycle years (2021-27).** Beginning partnership activities in 2018 was too late in the cycle to build the kind of deep community ties needed for reaching the hardest-to-count residents.
 - **Create permanent Partnership staff.** Waiting until the decennial cycle begins anew to onboard partnership staff meant relearning and rebuilding relationships with key stakeholders from the ground up, rather than building on existing relationships.
 - **Expand the role of Data Dissemination Specialists.** A common refrain from community members was, “How will my data be used?” The Bureau’s Data Dissemination Specialists work to help community groups, municipalities, businesses and other data users access and understand Census data. However, these are usually not linked with Partnership activities. A more robust link between these specialists and existing Census partners to reinforce the results of the 2020 Census may leave more robust relationships intact into the 2030 cycle.
 - **Publish a database of existing partners.** Census outreach often relies on trust and relationships, which have been carefully crafted over the past two years. Leaving these relationships to atrophy during the intervening years before the 2030 Census cycle would be counterproductive. Instead, this list of partners should be published and publicized to assist local communities in continuing to coordinate civic and Census engagement. This would also leave in place an infrastructure for the next decennial Census, as well as other data products and surveys, such as the American Community Survey.

- **Strengthen the Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA) operation:** The MQA operation was one of the most successful Census outreach operations, with paid Census staffers heading into the field and collecting Census responses in person at sites such as COVID-19 testing, food, water or mask distribution, businesses, public housing buildings, outdoor religious gatherings or other in-person events. However, the MQA operation was originally proposed and planned late in the cycle (starting in 2019).¹³

 - **Deploy Partnership Specialists rather than recruitment specialists.** Although recruitment specialists could assist most people, respondents often posed questions or concerns that would have more appropriately been asked to Partnership staff, who were more well-versed in community concerns.
 - **Retain a flexible partner-driven MQA system.** One success in the New Jersey effort was the creative ways in which partners proposed MQA settings that matched their needs and restrictions, especially in the midst of the pandemic. For example, mosques across the state volunteered to hold Census completion workshops after Friday outdoor worship services. The Census Bureau Partnership staff then designed MQA operations to fit those restrictions. This model worked well and should be replicated in future censuses.

- **Test messaging, questionnaires and communications materials for the decennial census, especially for key HTC communities.** Partners and community groups voiced concerns about Census messaging, wording and communications/advertising materials. Ensuring that messages speak to “people like me” mattered to local Census advocates, who often voiced that existing messaging and materials missed the mark. The 2020 Census also continued a trend of improving response rates in suburban and wealthier areas, while declines continued in urban, rural and lower-income areas. Figuring out which messages “work” in the diverse array of HTC populations will continue to be a major challenge.

 - Test runs of outreach and materials are as important as test runs of the survey itself. Although the Bureau releases the results of broad message tests,¹⁴ and performs End-to-End test runs of the Census itself, the effectiveness of particular materials and outreach messaging is often left to external groups. A number of national organizations undertook message testing for specific HTC groups, whose results differed from some of the Bureau’s original testing results.¹⁵
 - Perform additional tests of Internet differential response. As the Bureau begins relying more on email and internet-based surveys, such as the COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey, the risk of populations being left out in future surveys and censuses is a serious one. Obviously internet access will look different in 2030 than in 2020, but concerns about a digital divide will likely grow even larger.

- **Consider annual or regular updates of addresses, rather than large-scale LUCA operation.** The LUCA operation serves as the first contact many municipalities and county governments have to signal the coming decennial Census cycle. Yet this comes relatively late in the decade, and frequently requires extensive outreach to secure broad participation. A more regular contact with the Census Bureau would likely keep cities and counties more aware of the Census and more willing to participate in future outreach efforts.

- **Evaluate effectiveness of large contractor paid media services.** Although the Team Y&R marketing campaign had plenty of successes, New Jersey may be poorly served by an approach that focuses on national and media-market-level targeting. Many community-based media were overlooked because Team Y&R was not familiar with the paid media opportunities and missed key application windows. The failure to target ads at smaller geographies such as cities and neighborhoods also hurt HTC areas, which needed differentiated messaging and could have used a “surge” in ads when activity restarted over the summer. The single national paid-media contractor model should be reevaluated in light of the lessons learned from the 2020 paid media campaign.
- **Maintain media touch points for sharing Census data and supporting reporting efforts.** One bright spot in Census collaboration in New Jersey was the work of the Center for Cooperative Media, which hosted multiple webinars, roundtables and in-person events to share information about the 2020 Census, with support from The Fund for New Jersey and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. These conversations deepened reporter understanding of the Census, led to multiple stories placed in large and small publications and built important relationships between sources and reporters. As 2020 Census data becomes available, continuing these relationships and holding additional data summits will go a long way to ensuring that the Census remains front-of-mind for reporters and editors.

State and local government

- **Create permanent Census and data infrastructure.** One major takeaway is that the State has now built extensive competence and institutional knowledge about operating a Census outreach campaign. That infrastructure should be maintained so that it can be ramped up for the next Census rather than rebuilt during the next cycle.
 - **Create a permanent Census office or staff within the Secretary of State’s office.** Civic engagement for the Census will require coordination during off years, and the Secretary of State is the logical home for this work. Developing plans for 2030 will require staff dedicated to the Census, including developing cost and budget recommendations, continuing departmental coordination, and support for other Census data surveys such as the American Community Survey. The Census staffing infrastructure could be sustained over the next several years by repurposing it to work on increasing civic engagement in the various diverse communities across the state.
 - **Create a permanent state demographer position.** Currently, the State Data Center at the Department of Labor and Workforce Development coordinates a variety of state demographic information. However, a state demographer position would serve to share and publicize data on New Jersey’s changing population, as well as inform policy changes throughout government that may have impacts on particular demographic groups. This role would also be critical in data support for a 2030 Census outreach effort. Mapping specialists at the county and local level were extremely important for targeted Census outreach, and this capability would theoretically be expanded by a demographer office.

- **Identify permanent staffers in each department to be Census liaison even during non-decennial Census years.** The departmental liaisons were key to developing Census outreach through each of the departments, especially those with regular contact with residents. For example, the Motor Vehicle Commission’s inclusion of Census materials in mailings was a piece of low-cost contact with millions of homes. However, these liaisons have to be reestablished every Census. Permanent liaisons with career staff would help make these links easier to restart during the Census campaign and maintain institutional memory of past efforts.
- **Expand a successful grant program for non-profits earlier.** The non-profit and county grant program was extremely successful, with many of the grantees doing extensive outreach work deep into the Census cycle. However, grants did not go out the door until the end of 2019. Initial planning grants with smaller dollar amounts might be helpful for setting up the kind of coordinated infrastructure that New Jersey had at the state level for counties, localities and HTC populations. To ensure the timely distribution of grants, continuity of effort and to allow recipients to build effective outreach plans, the state should strongly consider a two-year budget cycle for Census outreach funding that would initiate two years prior to the count and carry through the decennial Census year.
- **Design a grant program to allow for more expenditures on staffing and time, rather than materials and event costs.** Person-to-person contact and staffing were extremely important elements of the outreach effort, especially when materials could only go so far to persuade or reach HTC populations. A mailing could cost \$10,000 but lack targeting to the appropriate places. In-person interactions were most likely to build the trust necessary to persuade hesitant non-responders into responders.
- **The required coordination between county and local non-profit grantees should be more stringently enforced.** There was clear language in both the county and non-profit grant applications that required collaboration between those entities, particularly if they occupied the same geographical space. At the outset, these entities often had not participated in this type of collaboration. State staff spent considerable effort building on this collaboration with varying rates of success. Counties had a range of experiences interacting with local community groups, and different counties took different approaches. Some counties chose not to apply at all for grants. In future grants, higher expectations for collaboration must be raised at the outset, along with efforts by the state to reinforce and build on that collaboration. Specific collaboration plans should be submitted by grantees as a requirement of their grants. Additionally, designating a non-county non-profit grantee as a lead in areas where no county is selected could be helpful to avoid situations without county engagement.
- **Stronger business outreach, especially in HTC areas.** In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, state funds have become a lifeline to New Jersey businesses, whether through the Economic Development Authority or other loan and grant programs. Businesses are often hubs of information in HTC communities, serving as gathering places. Local governments often have existing relationships with small businesses. A more strategic plan for business buy-in, building on existing state programs supporting small businesses, would be helpful in future campaigns.

Foundations/Funders

- **Build civic engagement infrastructure.** One big lesson of the Census outreach process is the importance of civic engagement at the local level, and the lack of infrastructure that exists currently, particularly among groups hesitant about or hostile to government. Building local groups to engage in conversations about neighborhood improvements, simple opportunities for input, and surveys of resident concerns can help lay the groundwork so each Census year is not another rush for engagement, which is both labor- and time-intensive. Developing a collaborative effort with the Department of State's civic engagement efforts would increase effectiveness.
- **Build in grants for understanding of Census and use of Census data prior to decennial Census.** One of the top responses of people hesitant to respond to the Census was asking how data was going to be used. Census data are a powerful tool to tell residents about their communities, and to assist non-profits in understanding who lives in their service areas. To build awareness of Census in non-decennial Census years, funders should consider funding data education on the Census for their grantees, as well as encouraging the use of Census data in grant applications and proposals. Collaboration with any of the Census Bureau's current and future free efforts to provide practical training on how to utilize Census data would be productive.
- **Establish planning grants for key HTC areas.** Certain HTC communities, especially groups with limited backbone organizations or civic engagement and lower response rates in 2020 than 2010, may benefit from earlier planning grants four-five years before the Census. This would help to build local community tables and complete count efforts targeted to particular communities (such as Haitian populations in Asbury Park or Arabic-speaking populations in Passaic County). These grants could serve as preliminary planning grants to identify and begin education efforts for trusted messengers in these HTC areas and communities.
- **Expand convening role, especially with local governments, to bring groups to the table earlier.** Some of the most successful local Census efforts were convened by foundations and local funders, such as the Princeton Area Community Foundation in Trenton and the Victoria Foundation in Newark. Bringing together stakeholders early in the process helped jumpstart the necessary conversations to create truly collaborative local Census outreach efforts.

Non-profit Community

- **Identify a permanent organization to conduct Census organizing and/or data presentations.** This role could be split among multiple organizations, but non-profit organizations that rely on data or that use data in their issue advocacy could be important vehicles for spreading Census information and maintaining relationships with organizations active on the Census in 2020.
- **Develop Asian group outreach strategy or umbrella organization.** Asian-Americans are New Jersey's fastest-growing ethnic group, and New Jersey is third-highest in Asian population percentage after Hawaii and California. Yet organizing this population was a consistent challenge; Asian groups cover a diverse range of cultures with linguistic, regional, national origin and religious backgrounds, often highly localized.

- **Publicize Census data and its uses during non-Census years.** Almost all organizations use Census data for planning, grant writing or basic demographic information on their service populations. However, many community members are unaware of how Census data affects them. One obstacle to understanding the Census for communities and HTC populations was that they did not understand how the data were used.
- **Statewide and “backbone” groups should build deeper connections with local groups,** especially fast-growing immigrant populations and faith communities outside of mainline churches. Many organizations that serve a geographic area were surprised at demographic changes that made traditional outreach efforts less effective. New or transient communities often required outreach strategies tailored to them, and new relationships were needed with leaders outside of historical partners.
- **Increase engagement with non-501(c)(3) organizations at the local level.** As more organizations, such as mutual aid societies and informal support networks, pop up to fill in gaps in social support systems, especially for low-income and immigrant communities, traditional anchor organizations and community-serving groups may need to expand their own networks to interact with and support these trusted messengers. One obstacle to funding during the 2020 Census project was that organizations without 501(c)(3) status could not apply for independent funding themselves, although they ultimately were important pieces of outreach efforts, supplying volunteers, language support and existing relationships with community members in hard-to-count areas.

Special Populations

- **Expand materials for persons with disabilities and training for county and local service providers on Census.** One issue that recurred in almost every county and municipality was how people with disabilities would be counted. Service providers wanted to know how they could assist, and independently living persons with disabilities often lacked access to the resources necessary to complete the Census. The Census Bureau should engage service providers, local and county disability and human services councils and disability rights organizations early on in the process in order to partner in getting the word out to persons with disabilities. Additionally, non-profit and government outreach organizers should include disability outreach as part of their targeted populations.
- **Consider allowing service providers to directly assist Census questionnaire completion.** One suggestion was to allow service providers to directly complete the Census questionnaire with their clients’ permission. Because clients are often already sharing data more extensive than that collected by the Census with service providers and many providers already assist with other government paperwork, the Census should provide clear guidance on how service providers can assist. These providers might include health clinics, free tax preparation, housing or job counseling, child care referral agencies, homelessness prevention, food pantries or soup kitchens or other direct service providers.

- **Develop a more robust plan for including homeless/housing-insecure service providers outside of service-based enumeration and overnight counts.** Many families may be moving in and out of homelessness or housing insecurity and may rely on homeless service providers outside of the set windows for service-based and overnight enumeration. Successful efforts to count families and individuals at food pantry MOAs and kiosks showed how counts of these HTC populations can be augmented with in-person counts connected to trusted messengers.
- **Clearer messaging on seasonal home response rates.** Certain seasonal housing areas in New Jersey, especially along the coast, had extremely low response rates due to the housing being unoccupied during the off season, compounded by COVID-19 closures. Clearer guidance and messaging from early stages could be helpful, as well as robust administrative records on second homes, or perhaps Census data collection on whether people resided anywhere other than their listed household address in the Census year. This problem will likely recur in 2030 if no changes are made.
- **New Jersey colleges and universities need accurate lists of off-campus student addresses during the school year.** Off-campus students are often missed by the Census but the problem was amplified by the closure of almost all on-campus classes and activities during spring 2020. Because many colleges did not maintain off-campus student address lists, except permanent addresses (usually parental or family homes), the colleges had no ability to share administrative data with the Census to ensure an accurate count. As a result, communities with high numbers of off-campus students may have substantial undercounts. This data would likely be helpful for other university information sharing and mailings, as well as for identifying geographically where students live during the school year.



Appendices/Attachments:

To view the documents, visit <https://acnj.org/every-moment-counts-census-2020-report-appendix/>

- Complete Count Commission plan
- Legislation from the Complete Count Commission
 - Budget resolution from the Complete Count Commission
- State grant materials
 - County grant guidelines
 - Non-profit grant guidelines
 - County grant awardees
 - Non-profit grant awardees
- List of funders supporting non-profit Census outreach
- Conceptual overview from The Fund for New Jersey
- Strategic plan from NJISJ
- Strategic plan from ACNJ for children under 5
- Census plan for City of Newark
- Agendas from notable convenings
 - The Fund for New Jersey initial census convening (May 2018)
 - ACNJ presentation on young children (January 2019)
 - Council of New Jersey Grantmakers (June 2019)
- Sample materials
 - Congressional/legislative district fact sheets
 - ACNJ Census Ambassador toolkit
 - ACNJ Young Child Fact Sheet (English/Spanish)
 - ACNJ Household Living Scenarios Fact Sheet, (English/Spanish)
 - ACNJ Census Palm Card, (English/Spanish)
 - ACNJ Generic Census Fact Sheet, English (English/Spanish)
- PowerPoint slides
 - Generic ACNJ Census Presentation
 - Asian American Federation Census Training Slides
- Kiosk guide
- Secretary of State weekly social media files
- Make the Road NJ flyers
- 2020 Census Overview revised 2019
- NJ Counts 2020 for Philanthropy
- Census Timeline for Philanthropy
- NJ Counts in 2020 flyer from NJISJ
- NJ Secretary of State Organizing Toolkit

Footnotes:

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Self-Response Rates Map, available at <https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates/self-response.html> (retrieved May 13, 2021).
- ² For a full listing of Census apportionment counts, the 2020 Census apportionment results are available on the Bureau's website: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-apportionment-data.html>
- ³ For the purposes of this analysis, hard-to-count areas are defined as Census tracts with a lower than 73 percent response rate in 2010, putting them in the bottom 20 percent of Census tracts nationally. However, many households or communities may be hard to count for other reasons but may live in Census tracts with higher response rates.
- ⁴ Compare response rates on October 15, available at <https://2020census.gov/content/dam/2020census/news/daily-nrfu-rates/nrfu-rates-report-10-15.pdf%2520with%2520October%252016>, available at <https://2020census.gov/content/dam/2020census/news/daily-nrfu-rates/nrfu-rates-report-10-16.pdf>
- ⁵ Sen-Yuan Wu, New Jersey Population: 1790 to 2010, New Jersey Department of Labor (2010). Available at https://www.nj.gov/labor/lpa/dmograph/est/nj1790_2010.pdf
- ⁶ Andrew Reamer, Brief 7: Comprehensive Accounting of Census-Guided Federal Spending (FY2017), Part B: State Estimates at Table 1 (February 2020). Available at https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/Counting%20for%20Dollars%202020%20-%20Comprehensive%20Accounting_Report%207B%20Feb%202020%20rev.pdf
- ⁷ Laura Schultz, Rockefeller Institute of Government, Giving or Getting? New York's Balance of Payments with the Federal Government, 2021 Report at p. 13 (January 2021), available at <https://rockinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-Balance-of-Payments-Report-web.pdf>
- ⁸ New Jersey State Data Center, Final 2020 LUCA Participation For New Jersey, with 2010 LUCA Participation (February 2, 2018), available at https://www.nj.gov/labor/lpa/census/2020/LUCA%202020%20Content/LUCA%202020%20.pdf/NJ_2020FinalLUCA_Participation.pdf
- ⁹ Center for Urban Research, Research Initiatives, available at <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Center-for-Urban-Research/CUR-research-initiatives>
- ¹⁰ <https://fundfornj.org/census>
- ¹¹ <https://nj.gov/state/assets/reports/2019-07-nj-complete-count-commission-report.pdf>
- ¹² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Table S1601: Language Spoken at Home, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=s1601&q=0400000US34&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1601&hidePreview=true>
- ¹³ The Census Bureau has taken down the original page describing the 2020 MQA operations. However, the archived page is still available here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210318005516/https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/planning-management/2020-mqa-operation.html>
- ¹⁴ The Census Barriers, Attitudes and Motivators Study (CBAMS) Survey complete reports are unavailable at this time on the Census Bureau's webpage, signaling that learning from the 2020 cycle is already being lost. A report on the findings of the CBAMS survey is still available here: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/pmr-materials/2019-02-01/5-cbams-survey-report-findings.pdf?>
- ¹⁵ Full message testing slide decks are available at the Census Counts national website, including message testing for Black/African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic/Latinx communities, as well as a special focus on young children, at <https://censuscounts.org/gotc-toolkit-messaging-and-media/>