



## **What Is Census 2020 and Why Does It Matter for New Jersey?**

The census is a count of all United States residents required by The U.S. Constitution every 10 years to determine Congressional districts. Also, the census has become an essential policy tool. The federal government depends on census data to allocate resources, state governments use census data to draw legislative districts and to direct spending, and academics, nonprofits, and businesses rely on census data to inform and direct their work. Almost everything we know about our population and our communities comes from information collected during the decennial census and its related surveys.

When New Jersey residents are not counted, the state loses funding and influence. In New Jersey, allocations from 16 large federal assistance programs (including Medicaid, SNAP, housing vouchers, and education grants) are based on statistics derived from the census count. In FY2015, the state received \$17.56 billion dollars in federal grants from these 16 programs alone,<sup>1</sup> an amount about half the size of the entire New Jersey state budget. Further, New Jersey lost a Congressional seat in 2013 after losing another in 1993. We now have 12 congressional districts, the lowest number since 1933, which limits our impact on federal decisions.

## **How Does the Census Work?**

The census form is a confidential household mail-in survey. But in the 2010 census, return rates for New Jersey's cities were very low: 55% in Newark, 50% in Irvington, 55% in Orange, 55% in Atlantic City, 56% in New Brunswick, 59% in Trenton, 60% in Paterson, and 61% in Camden.<sup>2</sup> These communities are [Hard-to-Count \(HTC\)](#).

Census workers go door-to-door in HTC areas to try to count people who did not return a survey, but the workers' only guide is the address list the Census Bureau has prepared. Some groups are more likely to be missed – especially immigrants, people of color, urban residents, children under 5, people living in multifamily housing, non-native English speakers, and people who are homeless. In contrast, wealthier white people are more likely to be double-counted.

Too many New Jerseyans go uncounted (more than 31,000 in the last census). Their interests are not heard when policy decisions are made.

## **What Are the Census Challenges in the U.S. and in New Jersey?**

Census 2020 will rely on digital submission of data, a new process that will require more personal follow-up. However, Congress has limited the Bureau to keep spending at or below the previous spending levels. Hard-to-count (HTC) communities will face new challenges exacerbated by limited internet access.<sup>3</sup> In addition, many experts worry about data privacy and the potential for census data to be used to target vulnerable communities. For example,

there have been proposals to include questions related to citizenship and immigration status, which would threaten the integrity of the census. The result would be a dangerously politicized census *and* an inaccurate count, both of which would skew any subsequent congressional and state redistricting and resource allocation.

Unlike in 2010, New Jersey needs to form a public Complete Count Committee to work with the Census Bureau. The state's 2010 effort was largely internal with no specific state budget allocation, and New Jersey's overall mail-in rate for census questionnaires actually fell to 74% in 2010 from 76% in 2000.

Based on analysis of previous census participation rates, 2020 HTC areas will include Newark, Paterson, Trenton, Camden, Atlantic City, Jersey City, and other urban areas.<sup>4</sup> Targeted and strategic outreach is necessary.

### **How Can We Improve the Census Count in New Jersey?**

The first opportunity is to **elevate state leadership**. Governor-elect Murphy needs to prioritize a complete count in 2020 and allocate appropriate state resources. The return on investment is likely to be high. For example, California estimates that its \$2 million investment in community address canvassing alone will yield at least \$100 million in annual federal contributions.<sup>5</sup> Other elected officials should join the charge, and they may be persuaded when they learn the consequences of a good count for their district/municipality.

New Jersey should **form a Complete Count Committee** that includes stakeholders from government as well as leaders from business, education, philanthropy, and nonprofits. In support, cultivate partnerships with business groups and faith-based organizations, in addition to traditional civil rights groups, to convey that the census is about counting *everybody*. Help businesses see how the census provides good, accessible data to determine market opportunities and to forecast demand.

Provide support to governments that **participate in the Bureau's Local Update of Census Addresses program** (LUCA). Although nine of New Jersey's 21 counties are not participating (including populous Hudson and Camden counties), many of the state's HTC urban areas did sign up for LUCA.<sup>6</sup> To ensure that governments that registered for LUCA can provide updated address lists within the six-month deadline, technical assistance should be supported.

Experts agree that the primary outreach **focus should be on HTC communities**, and local leadership is essential. A more complete count cannot be achieved by people who do not know the community or its residents. Local leaders need to be supported with (1) data analyses and mapping to understand HTC target areas; (2) local HTC task forces that represent the diversity of the community; (3) strategic messaging that is community-specific and can be accessed via traditional and social media; (4) training and jobs for local people to help complete the count; and (5) creation of "Get Counted" assistance centers at neighborhood sites. For HTC

populations that are difficult to geographically pinpoint (such as children under 5, elderly people, and people who are homeless), alternate outreach strategies must be developed in partnership with social service and advocacy organizations.

Across the state, it will be important to **motivate the public to participate** (via effective marketing including locally appropriate languages and ethnic media). Technology assistance will be needed to help people who access the internet via mobile phones (it is not yet known if the census survey will work on mobile).

Finally, the state of **New Jersey should support sound federal policy that ensures vulnerable populations' individual census data are secure**. If Homeland Security threatens immigration enforcement based on census data, philanthropy should support census protection work including rapid legal responses. If immigrants are not counted among our population, New Jersey will lose.

### **How Might The Fund For New Jersey and Partners Get Involved?**

- Organize a New Jersey Complete Count Committee
- Put the 2020 census on the governor-elect's agenda
- Support data analysis and mapping in order to target HTC communities
- Convene and develop statewide coalitions of philanthropy, business alliances, faith networks, and nonprofit organizations
- Recruit local leaders and trusted organizations in HTC areas to create HTC task forces
- Assist the Bureau to identify and hire city residents to help conduct the count
- Identify local agencies and institutions to serve as "Get Counted" assistance centers
- Support technical assistance for governments participating in LUCA
- Develop targeted and effective communications messages and materials

We believe The Fund and partners have an important opportunity to make a meaningful impact in New Jersey by leading the effort for a complete count in census 2020.

To join the effort, contact Kiki Jamieson ([kjamieson@fundfornj.org](mailto:kjamieson@fundfornj.org)).

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<sup>1</sup> "Counting for Dollars," produced by the George Washington Institute of Public Policy. [New Jersey report](#).

<sup>2</sup> 2010 Census participation rates. [Data downloaded](#) from the Census Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> Although broadband access in the state of New Jersey is better than in other states, there are gaps that correspond to hard-to-count communities. In some census tracts, access is estimated to be limited for 20%-40% of households.

<sup>4</sup> Hard to Count 2020. [Access the maps online](#), data provided by CUNY Center for Urban Research.

<sup>5</sup> Ed Kissam: "Toward A Fair, Accurate California Census Count in 2020: A Community-based Address Canvassing Initiative in 2017-2018." [wkf Giving Fund white paper](#).

<sup>6</sup> US Census Bureau, Registered 2020 LUCA Participants as of December 15, 2017 [map](#).