**2020 CENSUS TRUSTED MESSENGERS**  
**COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS CHALLENGED TO MAKE THE MARGINALIZED MATTER**  
Stephanie McNally, MNA - Master of Nonprofit Administration - Capstone Project

**SUMMARY**

The decennial census is the most inclusive civic activity in our country. As the cornerstone of the United States democracy, the census determines representation in Congress and the Electoral College, as well as providing the basis for drawing districts for federal, state, and local offices. $880 billion in Federal funding allocation and civil rights policy enforcement also rely on accurate census results. The nonprofit sector uses census data to develop, execute, and evaluate their programs as well as organize residents for civic and political participation. Certain population groups – referred to as “hard-to-count” – are at a higher risk of not being counted in the census and can lead to unequal political representation and inequitable access to vital public and private resources for these groups and their communities.

**PURPOSE**

“Quality information is a public good, and much effort goes into its dissemination in formats accessible to commercial firms, the nonprofit sector, the media, and social scientists whose research helps to show the country where it has been and where it might be going” (Hillygus, Nie, Prewitt, & Pals, 2006, p.78). We have one chance every 10 years to get an accurate and fair count of every person living in our country.

**METHODS**

Data collection followed a mixed method approach including secondary data from a review of relevant literature and Census data analysis focused on hard-to-count populations.

a) Utilized existing research conducted and published by the U.S. Census Bureau
b) Leveraged CBO leadership interviews to compare findings from research with current practices for successful outreach in hard-to-count communities
c) Attended 2020 Census convenings and gathered perspectives from expert presenters and panel discussions
d) Capitalized on role at Canal Alliance to advise on pragmatic recommendations

**DATA AND ANALYSIS**

**PERCENTAGE NET UNDERCOUNT BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Hispanic Origin</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Asian</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian on Reserv</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian off Reserv</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Origin</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Statistically significantly different from zero
- Negative number indicates an overcount

**POTENTIAL EXTENT OF CITIZENSHIP QUESTION AS BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION IN THE 2020 CENSUS ON PERCEIVED RISKS**

- High
- Mixed
- Low

**RESULTS**

A. Many people were unfamiliar with the census, with only 33 percent being “extremely” or “very” familiar. Knowledge about the purpose and process of the census was uneven across groups.

B. Funding for public services was a top participation motivator across groups, yet less than half of respondents knew that the census is used to determine community funding.

C. Messaging is needed to convey how the census directly benefits local communities, now and in the future.

D. Providing information to the Census Bureau’s data protection policies will not alone mitigate respondent concerns around privacy and confidentiality.

E. Trusted voices and organizations with deep community roots may facilitate participation among the most skeptical:
   i. Providing information about the community funding and the general census process
   ii. Assuring people that participation is safe

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create training materials for all CBOs within a county or region
- Train champions at each CBO to advance outreach efforts
- Utilize digital and face-to-face canvassing to GOTC (get out the count)
- Build shared communications hub to support all trusted messenger outreach efforts
- Use Opportunity Agenda Framework to develop messaging
- Use Align Action Framework to collaborate on activities and measure progress

**IDENTIFYING HARD-TO-COUNT (HTC) POPULATIONS**

A. Hard to Interview: Participation hindered by language barriers, low literacy, lack of Internet access
B. Hard to Personalize: Susceptible to the government, low levels of civic engagement
C. Hard to Locate: Non-conventional housing, units off the grid, persons wanting to remain hidden
D. Hard to Count: Highly mobile, people experiencing homelessness, physical access barriers such as gated communities

**RESEARCH**

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have earned the trust of residents from historically hard-to-count communities and have the potential to increase census participation in a challenging climate if provided an effective outreach model.

1. Given the current political climate, attitudes and barriers in the upcoming 2020 Census, what do CBOs propose as the most impactful outreach activities to motivate hard-to-count communities to participate?
2. How do CBOs think survey collection procedures will impact census participation in hard-to-count communities?
3. What approaches are CBOs taking to maximize impact of census outreach without adding capacity and can they be synthesized into a toolkit?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**