2020 Census Trusted Messengers:
Community Based Organizations Challenged to Make the Marginalized Matter

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Abstract

The decennial census is the cornerstone of the United States democracy. Its purpose is to determine representation in Congress and the Electoral College as well as provide the basis for drawing districts for federal, state, and local offices. California’s voice in public policy decision-making would diminish if votes were lost in a census undercount. Additionally, federal funding is allocated based on each state’s population as determined by the census. If California’s residents are not accurately counted, the state stands to lose almost $2,000 per person per year for the next 10 years. Currently, trust in the federal government is low and significant changes to the census process are predicted to reduce participation in historically undercounted populations. The equity gap in California is growing and a fair and accurate count provides the data to inform more inclusive decision-making at all levels. Marginalized populations are growing and a lack of data makes it more difficult for the public, private and social sectors to direct resources to support those who need it most. Intervention from trusted messengers has motivated hard-to-count communities to participate in past census counts. The current anti-immigrant political climate and concerns around recent data hacking scandals threaten to decrease and already declining census response rate. Community based organizations (CBOs) have earned the trust of residents from historically hard-to-count communities. This report will review research on past census outreach efforts as well as current studies on messaging for hard-to-count communities that are considered at risk in the upcoming decennial census. CBOs’ proven outreach methods must be enhanced to face the challenges of the 2020 Census.
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Section 1. Introduction

The decennial count of all U.S. residents is required by the U.S. Constitution to determine representation in Congress and the Electoral College. Additionally, these data are the basis for drawing districts for federal, state, and local offices. In California, the census is key to the allocation of seventy-seven billion dollars in federal funding for Medi-Cal, Medicare Part B, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Section 8 Vouchers and many other programs. Data resulting from the census is widely used by researchers, governments, businesses, and other organizations to plan for and deliver products and services. All of the stakeholders previously mentioned are deeply concerned about addressing the predicted census undercount.

Studies of past census counts and the results from the American Community Survey (ACS) show that response rates are declining overall and that hard-to-count (HTC) populations are at risk of even higher non-response rates than in the past. This challenges the federal government and its partners to understand why this is happening and how to counteract it. Attitudes and barriers regarding census participation researched and reported by the Census Bureau (Bureau) also indicate a higher risk of increasing nonresponse rates than in past decennial census counts. Every person residing in the United States today is affected by the diminishing accuracy of the census data due declining civic engagement. California is disproportionately impacted, as it is home to twenty percent of the top fifty HTC counties in the nation.

The purpose of this report is to review existing research from various sources including the Bureau and outreach methodology employed by nonprofits to develop a model for CBOs to optimize limited resources in increasing census response rates for populations identified as HTC by the California Complete Count Committee (CCCC) and the Bureau. The report begins with a review of the relevant literature regarding outreach and results from previous decennial counts. From the data analysis, recommendations for an outreach model and messaging framework will be presented to support the work of trusted messengers in mitigating the challenges facing an accurate 2020 Census.
Section 2: Literature Review

Why Does the Census Matter?

Census Data Use

“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). Today, the compilation of accurate census data is central to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a broad range of civil rights laws and policies, from fair political representation and voting reforms, to equal opportunity and access across all economic and social sectors of society, including housing, education, health care, and the job market (Lowenthal, 2014). Census data are vital to health equity, allocation of funding for health-related federal programs, and the ability of public health practitioners and researchers to quantify disease burdens in the communities they serve (Strane & Griffis, 2018). For example, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's data collection methodology for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is based on the decennial census and is redesigned after each decennial count (Clark, 2018).

National Public Radio broadcasted a story about the mayor of a town in Rhode Island that recently won state funds to clean up the city's only two athletic fields – both found to have arsenic, lead, and other industrial contamination in the soil (Wang & Peñaloza, 2018). In the podcast, Mayor James Diossa tells Wang that “the city got the money using census numbers,” and he adds to “make sure there’s enough funding for the city's fields, roads and schools, he'll need all of Central Falls to be counted for the 2020 Census” (2018). Census failure means that communities will be starved of crucial resources and everyone suffers, especially those with the least power -- people in poverty, children of color, and new immigrants (Bass, Hernández, Picower & Walker, 2018). Bass et al. argue that the coming decade of data and decision making for our democracy is at risk if we do not ensure that every person in America is counted (2018).

Defining Hard to Count Populations

Counting everyone once, only once and in the right place, is what the Bureau declares as its goal for the decennial census. The stated purpose of this act of civic engagement is to conduct a census of population and housing and disseminate the results to the President, the States, and the American People (Chapin, Kim, Lopez, &
Belton, 2018). Census data is primarily used to (a) apportion representation among states as mandated by Article 1, Section 2 of the United States Constitution; (b) draw congressional lines and state legislative districts, school districts and voting precincts; (c) enforce voting rights and civil rights legislation; (d) distribute federal dollars to states; (e) inform federal, tribal, state and local government planning decisions; (f) inform business and nonprofit organizations (e.g., where to locate, size of market); (g) provide population benchmarking for nearly every other United States survey (Chapin et al., 2018).

Considered the largest civic engagement mobilization in our nation with an impact on every person residing in the United States, an accurate and complete count is critical. In the book *The Hard Count: The Political and Social Challenges of Census Mobilization*, the authors validate the broad and challenging scope of the decennial census as a statistical description of the nation’s population, and concede that “this population is made up of many different groups that vary in how easy they are to find as well as in how willing they are to cooperate” (Hillygus et al., 2006, p. 22). The Bureau developed a metric to identify and predict HTC populations within the U.S. by tracking the mail nonresponse rate in specific census block groups or tracks. The low response score (LRS) alone was not sufficient to categorize and target geographic areas according to propensity to self-respond in sample surveys and censuses. In a study from Erdman and Bates (2017), it was concluded that the LRS would be useful to census and survey planners with the caveat that the response metric predicted by the model is based on a single mode of self-response (mail).

To refine its efforts to pinpoint HTC populations, the Bureau developed a summary score identifying areas that are difficult to count based on ethnographic research regarding barriers to enumeration. Twelve variables were included in the HTC score to reflect the reasons people are missed in censuses, including housing variables (e.g., percentage of vacant houses, percentage of housing units without a phone, and percentage of multi-unit structures) and sociodemographic and economic indicators (e.g., the percentage of people below poverty, percentage of linguistically isolated households, and percentage of renter households) (as cited by Erdman & Bates, 2017).

While the HTC metric tells the story of the people that did not self-respond by mail with housing, sociodemographic and economic variables taken into account, prior count data may not predict non-respondent behavior as accurately in 2020 due to several factors:

- The current negative political climate regarding immigrants and refugees
- The potential addition of a citizenship question to the decennial census
• The introduction of a digital survey option for self-response and nonresponse follow-up
• Underfunding of the Bureau leading up to the decennial census

These factors specifically affect the likelihood of HTCs to respond to the 2020 Census. Understanding the effect each of the considerations listed above will have on the organizations closest to these populations and how to address them will go a long way to reducing historical undercounts.

In preparation for outreach and participation in 2020, the Bureau will utilize Tourangeau’s *Hard to Survey Populations*’ (as cited in Bates, 2017) framework according to a survey lifecycle. The framework in Figure 1 identifies the four drivers of historical census undercounting. The groups represented may be hard to locate, hard to contact, hard to persuade or hard to interview. The framework predicts a lower overall response rate and with that a disproportionately larger undercount of the population of marginalized residents in the U.S. From this framework the Bureau developed the following list of HTC communities:

• Children age 0-5
• Highly mobile persons
• Racial and ethnic minorities
• Non-English speakers
• Low income persons
• Persons experiencing homelessness
• Undocumented immigrants
• Persons who distrust the government
• LGBTQ persons
• Persons with mental or physical disabilities
• Persons who do not live in conventional housing
The methodology used to identify HTC populations and design appropriate outreach underlies the accuracy of the data collected and used to make pivotal policy and economic decisions. Considered the most accurate count to date, the 2010 Census overcounted white residents by nearly 1 percent while failing to count 1.5 million people of color, including 1.5 percent of Hispanics, 2.1 percent of blacks, and 4.9 percent of Native Americans on reservations, the Bureau concluded in post census reflection (as cited by Berman, 2018). This failure to accurately count individuals based on their racial makeup is called the differential undercount and is an issue in every decennial census count. Differential undercounting of minorities, well documented since the 1940s, has improved recently, though the uncertainties facing the 2020 Census could undermine the efforts to ensure accurate representation of historically undercounted populations in census data (Strane & Griffis, 2018). Strane and Griffis point out that “Although it is possible to statistically adjust census counts to reflect undercounting via estimation techniques, it would likely be highly controversial and without historical precedent” (2018, p. 1331).

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted multiple challenges to enumerating HTCs in 2020 based on its own audits of both the 2010 and 2020 decennial census efforts (Goldenkoff, 2018). Goldenkoff (2018) reported that:

Moreover, as we previously recommended in 2010, the Bureau also plans to develop predictive models to help allocate its advertising using: (1)
these predictive response data, (2) results describing the complexity of
difficult enumeration from its recent “behaviors, attitudes, and
motivators survey” study and focus groups, and (3) other third-party
data. (p. 10)

Additionally, the GAO report highlights the differential undercount issue with
data from the Bureau as shown in Figure 2.

*Figure 2. Certain Sociodemographic Groups Experienced Differential Undercounts in the 2010 Census*

![Graph showing differential undercounts by race/ethnicity and tenure status.]

Source: As cited in Goldenkoff, 2018, p. 4

According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), California has grown
by 2.3 million residents and become more diverse since the 2010 Census (Bohn, S.,
Hayes, J. & Thorman, T., 2019). The state’s Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) published a
report emphasizing why a complete and accurate count in 2020 is essential to prevent
misallocation of representation and funding within the state (Taylor, 2018). The LAO
publication provides a couple of reasons for increased undercounting risk in California in
2020. First of all, relative to other states, California’s HTC population is a larger share of
the state’s overall population. In fact, approximately two-thirds or sixty-three percent
of the state’s population is Hispanic or non-white, which is close to twice the national
rate of thirty-nine percent (Taylor, 2018). Second, immigrant households may be even
harder to count than in the past. Concerns about confidentiality with the possible
addition of the citizenship question and multigenerational living arrangements will make
the Bureau’s enumeration job tougher in 2020 in regards to immigrant families.
Focusing on HTC Immigrant Populations

California’s Latinx and Immigrant Population

PPIC research found that “California has more immigrants than any other state” (Johnson & Sanchez, 2018). As indicated in Figure 3, while the percentage has fluctuated over time, California has consistently been home to more foreign-born residents compared to nationwide statistics. Another PPIC researcher underscores that California’s more than ten million immigrants, a quarter of whom are undocumented, are deeply affected by the federal government’s rhetoric and actions targeting them (Hayes, 2019). This finding raises concerns in census participation among the foreign-born population, even those legally in the United States.

**Figure 3. California Has Had High Shares of Foreign-Born Residents for Decades**

![Graph showing foreign-born residents as a percentage of the population over decades.]

Source: As cited by Johnson & Sanchez, 2018

Recent census pretest interviews and focus groups surfaced concerns over data use and survey participation due to the Muslim travel ban, the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and immigration enforcement in general (Chishti & Bolter, 2018). These results from people, especially immigrants, expressing confidentiality concerns were higher than in the prior surveys. The Bureau has not tested the addition of the citizenship question, which many experts expect will lower the response rate from documented and undocumented immigrants even further.

The argument for adding the citizenship question without testing was based on the inclusion of this question on other surveys such as the ACS implemented by the
Bureau. The Bureau’s own data in Figure 4 shows “Between 24-35 percent of noncitizens who were part of the subset asked about their citizenship status on the 2000 census and on the ACS in 2010 and 2016 answered the question incorrectly, according to Bureau research” (Chishti & Bolter, 2018).

**Figure 4. Self-Response to Citizenship Question, by Citizenship Status, 2000**

![Pie chart showing self-response rates for citizenship question by citizenship status](image)

Source: Chishti & Bolter, 2018

Chishti and Bolter conclude that “If the decennial census misses a large portion of Hispanic or foreign-born residents, for example, then future surveys cannot be adjusted to accurately represent the U.S. population” (2018). According to a report published by the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund and the Latino Community Foundation (LCF), Latinos are now the state’s largest population group due to a ninety percent overall growth rate in the last decade and one-third of them are living in HTC tracts (NALEO Educational Fund & Latino Community Foundation, 2018).

**Enumerating the Immigrant Population**

Immigrant communities have posed special difficulties in past census-taking activities. If they are in this country illegally, they are reluctant to participate for fear their information would be shared with government immigration agencies. Additionally, many of these individuals are fleeing from countries with authoritarian or corrupt governments, which makes them unwilling to share personal information with public officials. Enumeration of this population is further complicated by language and cultural differences. Compounding that, immigrants often live in areas characterized by crowded housing conditions where residents are reluctant to cooperate with the census
if they have more relatives or renters living with them than are allowed under their leases (Hillygus et al., 2006).

In the U. S., there is an upward trend of foreign-born residents, and in comparing the 1990 and 2000 census counts, the estimated number of illegal immigrants doubled from 3.5 million to 7 million, as shown in Figure 5. Hillygus et al. highlighted that “High rates of immigration increased the proportion of individuals who had difficulty with English, from 4.8 percent in 1980 to 8.1 percent in 2000” (2006, p.25). This indicates a dramatic increase in the HTC population in the years leading up to the 2000 census. This growth has continued for both legal and undocumented immigrants. As reported by the Department of Homeland Security, as of 2007 there were nearly twelve million undocumented and nineteen million legal non-US citizens residing in the United States and over half of them living in one of four states: California, Texas, Florida, and Arizona (as cited in Burmila, n.d.).

Figure 5. Estimated Unauthorized Immigrant Population in the United States, 1990 to 2000.

Source: As cited by Hillygus et al., 2006.

The Bureau is instituting several changes to the 2020 survey that are designed to improve the quality of data and reduce operational cost, which many experts agree puts a rigorous count of Latinx as well as all HTC populations at risk. This will be the first digital decennial census with a plan to reduce paper mailings of the questionnaire by promoting the internet as the primary response mode. This approach may lead to lower participation due to limited access to the online questionnaire. Increasing the use of administrative records (such as Social Security and Internal Revenue Service data) to
reduce cost presents another dilemma: using government records and private third-party data to build the master address file of U.S. households does not take into account residents that do not have a Social Security number. Another gap is that administrative records may lack true data on the race or ethnicity of residents. If this data is used for the initial mailing of census materials or for follow up of households that did not respond, it may miss HTC populations including Latinx residents. A planned reduction of field presence of local census offices and staff will impede the accurate count of HTC residents, and the Bureau may experience difficulties in reaching Latinos in HTC areas. Many Latinos and immigrants, both documented and undocumented, fear information given to the government may be used to harm their families, resulting in a distrust that could significantly reduce the willingness to participate. The current administration’s requirement to only hire U.S. citizens to serve as Census workers and not employ legal permanent residents or other work-authorized non-citizens in outreach or enumerator positions deprives the Census workforce of the skills needed to gain the trust of community members (“2020 Census Jobs”, n.d.).

**Partnership Approach for Census Outreach**

**History of Census Partnership Program**

The census partnership program was created from the experiences of the Census 1970 community education effort, the Census 1980 Community Services Program, and the Census 1990 Community Awareness and Products Program (Tinajero, 2000). This partnership and marketing program developed for Census 2000 expanded the Bureau’s prior outreach efforts in the following noticeable ways (Tinajero, 2000):

- Formal partnership agreement process identifying specific actions to be implemented jointly by the Bureau and governmental and nongovernmental partners;
- Selection of a diverse group of partners;
- Broader range of activities involving cross-sector businesses, organizations, and leaders;
- Inclusive outreach of private- and public-sector organizations reaching out to local communities;
- Significant investment of Bureau staff and funds to support planned and structured interactions with local communities.

Collaborations between the Bureau and other cross-sector organizations led to the design of a comprehensive model intended to build on a foundation of community
awareness and improve the accuracy of the decennial count. The local component of the partnership program reflected the belief that the foundation for broad-based participation in the census must be built at the community level.

An assessment of the 2010 Census National Partnership program concluded that the program increased partner organizations’ census awareness levels to serve as the trusted third party voice in promoting participation to their HTC communities and recommended that in 2020 the program identifies and partners with more emerging population organizations that reach out to groups not as familiar to the typical Bureau collaborator domain such as the disabled, young people, and multi-ethnic groups (King & Wycinsky, 2012). While this assessment focused on census staff operations, the final recommendations for business processes could be adapted to a model for the partners. King & Wycinsky emphasized that developing a more robust, transferable, mobile, interactive, and engaging training program and a more on-demand and engaged materials development and delivery system incorporating in-language materials in an efficient manner will better leverage finite resources and funding. CBOs committed to the Bureau’s partnership program will be more effective in outreach activities if they have a model that includes staff training and on-demand language and culturally appropriate materials delivery system provided for them.

**The Role of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)**

In his study of the 2010 Census, Rodríguez-Muñiz stated that “Even if people could be convinced that the census was merely a data-gathering initiative, state practices against undocumented immigrants reinforced fears and added fuel to the boycott” (2017, p.414). Ten years later, while the calls for a census boycott are not evident yet, the negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants and the last-minute addition of a citizenship question create a similar situation where the Bureau, while not a partisan agency, is viewed as under the umbrella of the current administration casting immigrants in an unfavorable light. Bass et al. contend that the consequences of an inaccurate census will be deeply felt throughout government, business, and civil society for the next 10 years - setting back foundations and nonprofits goals (2018). Local nonprofits and CBOs serving the HTC population are indispensable. They earn the trust of their communities and are in a position to increase census participation. For the past two years, given that CBOs have been urging immigrants not to open their doors to federal agents if they fear for their family’s security, affirmation from nongovernment entities during the 2020 enumeration is critical (NALEO Educational Fund & Latino Community Foundation, 2018).
CBOs identified as trusted messengers alone will not convince fearful immigrants to participate in the census. Culturally appropriate messaging combined with an understanding of how each HTC population feels most comfortable sharing personal information are essential. In 2020, the Bureau will make the questionnaire available by online, phone or paper survey methods. To be effective, questionnaire assistance centers must be staffed by trusted messengers. Sensitivity to perceptions regarding confidentiality and security of data provided online versus on paper should be taken into account as well.

**Collective Action for Outreach Efforts**

Building on the Bureau’s 2010 Partnership program, the 2020 Census Community Partnership and Engagement Program (CPEP) aims to leverage the existing network of philanthropic, nonprofit, and community organizations working at the local level to encourage response to the decennial census. Figure 6 provides an overview of the federal government’s plan to utilize cross-sector partnerships in order to execute an accurate count in 2020. The CPEP was designed to engage community partners to increase decennial participation of those who are less likely to respond or are often missed (Hall, 2017). Hall’s presentation lists the objectives as (a) educating people about the 2020 Census and fostering cooperation with enumerators; (b) encouraging community partners to motivate people to self-respond and; (c) engaging grass roots organizations to reach out to hard to count groups and those who aren’t motivated to respond to the national campaign (2017). The overarching goal is leveraging the trusted voices of respected spokespersons who can influence targeted populations to articulate the importance of the 2020 Census and encourage self-response (Hall, 2017).
Hillygus et al. (2006) assert that:

In a democracy, statistical information is a public good. This public good is particularly vulnerable to collective action problems because it exists only if high levels of cooperation are reached (p. 119).

Collective action in this context refers to the outreach taken together by a group of people whose goal is to achieve a common objective. Decennial census education and outreach targeting HTC communities to increase response rates requires more than collective action to be successful; it necessitates a goal of collaboration based on the framework of collective impact. While the collective impact framework was designed for large scale “wicked” social problems that involve long-term solutions engaging multiple cross-sector entities, it can be simplified to support a short-term effort that has a broad and deep impact on our democracy. The National Council of Nonprofits explains that:

While a collaboration often implies only a two-way street, collective impact has been described as “building on the muscle of collaboration” to create an entire community that is intentional about its approach to solving a problem or multiple problems – together.

The five conditions of collective impact are displayed in Figure 7.
Utilizing the structure defined for collective impact initiatives is more than CBOs need or have the capacity for when addressing the problem of differential undercount. However, the mindsets for genuine collective impact success described by Kania et al. (2014) are transferable to the challenges confronting CBOs in 2020 Census HTC outreach. Answering and monitoring the questions of who is involved, how people work together, and how progress happens can be used to develop a model that supports CBOs in leveraging their current capacity and relationships to plan and implement outreach that will increase HTC response rates. State and local government as well as community foundations are allocating funding to support census outreach in HTC communities. These entities have defined the key conditions for collective impact as part of dispersing funds in support of census outreach activities. Elements of a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support are all evident as CBOs embark on the months leading up to the start of the 2020 Census self-response period beginning in March 2020 and continuing through the end of April 2020.

Kania et al. recommend beginning by getting all the right eyes on the problem (2014). Commitment of relevant stakeholders from various impacted populations to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem improves the understanding of the issues and creates a sense of aligned action and mutual accountability. Reaffirming that the relational is as important as the rational. This variation of a collective impact or an aligned action model succeeds only when the process attends to both the use of data and the strengthening of relationships. In most cases, the process begins where the
solutions are unknown. By defining how information is shared and how partners engage with each other, insights surface that pinpoint new strategies as the process progresses. Paying close attention to adaptive work, not just technical solutions, is key. Establishing continuous feedback loops for rapid learning and facilitating responses among partners allows for adaptive problem solving by pushing multiple organizations to look for resources and innovations. Without recognizing that success happens from a mix of many interventions, a model that incorporates these vital mindset shifts such as indicated in collective impact or aligned action initiatives is unlikely to make progress on a challenging goal (Kania et al., 2014).

**Messaging in 2020**

**The Political Climate**

“In addition to challenges of undercounting faced in the past, there are new concerns about the willingness of Hispanic and Latino immigrant communities and Muslim communities to participate or self-identify in the 2020 Census because of increases in hostility directed at these communities, as well as the addition of a citizenship question in this census” (Strane & Griffis, 2018, p.1331). Even though the Bureau is prevented from disclosing personally identifiable information, public perceptions of risk and lack of trust in government may decrease participation in the 2020 Census among members of these communities. For this reason, the “Census Bureau will continue to rely on its Integrated Partnership and Communications (IPC) operation—designed to communicate the importance of census participation and motivate self-response—as a key component of its efforts to improve enumeration of hard-to-count persons in the 2020 Census” (Goldenkoff, 2018, p. 9). The IPC team’s priorities are to engage grassroots organizations to motivate HTC populations to participate along with educating people about the census and encouraging them to self-respond.

The 2020 presidential election may also impact the outreach to HTC populations. California moved its primary up to the first week of March 2020, which is earlier than in prior election cycles and coincides with the first round of census mailings to begin the self-response enumeration process. The timing could be seen as advantageous or disastrous depending on the ability of trusted messengers to respond to the campaign rhetoric and “fake news” regarding the Latino and immigrant communities in California and nationally. It is generally expected that immigration will be a key issue in the 2020 race. This presents the opportunity to engage HTC populations to fight back by motivating census participation or it could heighten fear and distrust of government and
reduce participation. “Ron Jarmin, the Deputy Director of the Census Bureau, confirmed the bureau was anticipating disinformation campaigns, and was enlisting the help of big tech companies to fend off the threat.” (Brown, 2019). Brown describes how “So-called “fake news” strategies can take myriad forms, according to cyber experts: posing as a demographic group to convey false information under the guise of advocacy; spreading false data by doctoring ads and news stories; or circulating bogus information to drum up fear and opposition” (2019). CBOs as trusted messengers must be adaptive and well-informed to counteract this threat to increasing the undercount of HTC populations.

**Social Marketing Campaigns**

The 2010 Census was the first to conduct a structured research program to classify and pinpoint hard-to-survey populations for purposes of social marketing. One program of Bureau research produced a geographic audience segmentation of the entire United States population. This segmentation then became the backbone of the social marketing campaign, informing decisions from messaging, to partnership activities, to media spends, to the media channels selected to deliver the campaign messages (Bates, 2017).

Hillygus et al. explained that “Like other forms of civic engagement, census participation is inherently a collective action problem” (2006, p. 8). Civic mobilization requires persuading an individual to participate in an activity that has minimal direct benefit (Hillygus et al., 2006). If a new digital device or the latest popular Netflix series gives immediate gratification, voting or filling out a census form requires a different sales pitch. Participating in the decennial census count contributes to tremendous societal and community good, but offers little concrete benefit to most U.S. residents. The CBOs acting as trusted messengers working in partnership with the Bureau are tasked with developing a compelling message to motivate HTC groups.

Engaging HTC populations with culturally sensitive and tailored outreach methods is likely to be ineffective if offered by messengers who are not culturally competent (Dixon & Rasch, 2006). CBOs were identified as having the cultural and linguistic competency required to effectively deliver a message on the importance of census participation. Dixon and Rasch’s (2006) study in engaging minority populations in rehabilitation and mental health agencies presents a similar challenge for CBOs doing census outreach. They begin with defining community outreach as “making the members of a community aware of some dimension, which might be a problem, unmet need, available service or resource, and then engaging them in a manner sensitive to the
nature of their community” (Dixon and Rasch, 2006, p. 34). Similarly, successful outreach and motivation of diverse ethnic and cultural groups requires cultural sensitivity on the part of agencies in the materials and methods they use (Dixon & Rasch, 2006). Dixon and Rasch observed that “With Hispanics, it is important to be sensitive to the values placed on family, respect for elders, importance of self-esteem, ritual and ceremony, fatalism, and positive and cordial behavior in social interactions” (2006, p.38). Additionally, empowerment was instrumental in successful outreach and engagement for all racial, cultural or ethnic groups experiencing a sense of alienation or disenfranchisement (Dixon & Rasch, 2006).

Community Engagement

Community engagement messaging can be defined as who we believe are part of the community and whom we are willing to see. Additionally, it is about providing marginalized people a voice and an opportunity to share leadership and develop their skills to attract the attention of policymakers. On a practical level, community engagement in collective impact is particularly relevant when putting together a common agenda (Barnes, Born, Harwood, Savner, Stewart, & Zanghi, 2014). The 2020 Census provides an opportunity to practice a form of collective impact that is less formal but no less important to the marginalized populations served by CBOs.

Historically, change happens on a larger scale in this country when a critical mass of organizations comes together and agrees that there is something important to accomplish. But this occurs only when everyday people believe the issue is vitally important and are willing to change their own behavior and see it as a priority for themselves, their communities, and their lives. (Barnes et al., 2014). Despite the best intentions, most CBOs are oriented inward toward their own organization and process. It is essential that CBOs make a commitment to turn outward toward the community and broaden their perspective, individually as well as collectively. Most people are looking to be part of something larger than themselves. They want to come back into public life to build something together. Collective impact or aligned action initiatives in civic and community engagement are the golden opportunity for that to happen.

A nonprofit organization’s motivation to collaborate reflects its assessment of expected risks and rewards from a partnership arrangement” (Jang, Feiock, & Saitgalina, 2016). Based on this perspective, Jang et al. argue that “benefits from collaboration will be realized collectively across the partnerships, but the costs will be experienced individually by participating nonprofit organizations; these cost factors should be considered to better understand nonprofit collaborations” (2016, p. 171). The decennial
census presents CBOs with the favorable circumstance of working across sectors and building beneficial relationship and the added burden of outreach activities with limited resources and capacity. The decision to engage with federal, state and local governments to plan and execute outreach activities for HTC groups results in the reflection Jang et al. (2016) reference as risk and reward. The need for advocacy on behalf of the benefits of accurate census data for underrepresented groups endorses the idea of collaboration and a collective impact model. Jang et al. propose that CBOs “are more likely to participate in informal collaborations, with results demonstrating that their traditional way of service provision led such nonprofits to participate in informal collaborations” (2016, p. 182). CBOs understand how to reach their HTC communities and often lack the systems or support from other sectors to build short-term capacity to maximize their role as trusted messengers in decennial census events.

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

Approach to Research

The premise of the research presented in this paper is to assess the capacity of CBOs to leverage their roles as trusted messengers to increase 2020 Census participation in the historically HTC communities they serve. Each decennial census presents the social sector with a set of challenges that threaten an accurate count. While federal and state governments have incorporated partnerships with CBOs in their operational plans to reduce undercount risk, what is not acknowledged is the capacity and resources vital to the success of these collaborations. CBOs have earned the trust of residents from recognized HTC communities and have the potential to increase census participation in a challenging environment if provided an effective outreach mechanism. The following three questions aim to advance the idea that building an outreach toolkit to leverage capacity with limited resources is possible and essential for CBOs to be most impactful in civic engagement endeavors including the 2020 Census.

- 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?
- How do CBOs think survey collection procedures will impact census participation in hard to count communities?
- What approaches are CBOs taking to maximize impact of census outreach without adding capacity and can it be synthesized into a toolkit?
Data collection for this project followed a mixed method approach comprised of secondary data from a review of relevant literature and Bureau studies and reports used in the formation of the 2020 Census Operational Plan. Expert interviews furnished the CBO perspective on the CPEP component of the Bureau’s plan and validated what materials and support are needed for efficacious HTC outreach. Attendance at 2020 Census convenings held by the State of California, San Mateo County and First 5 California provided additional insights from expert presenters and panel discussions that augmented the expert interviewees’ observations regarding the concept of a CBO Census 2020 toolkit. My role at Canal Alliance in regards to the 2020 Census allowed me to capitalized on knowledge gained as a staff member of a CBO serving an HTC population to view the data and research from a beneficiary lens and develop pragmatic recommendations.

**Professional Expertise**

Canal Alliance exists to break the generational cycle of poverty for Latino immigrants and their families by lifting barriers to their success. This organization embarked on a strategic initiative to educate the leadership, staff, board of directors, local government and other nonprofits in Marin County two years prior to the upcoming decennial census launch in March 2020. The journey began with an in-depth research project to learn about the Bureau's plans for 2020, including considerable changes to data collection methods, repercussions of underfunding and the current administration’s actions to undermine the accuracy of census data for political gain. The comprehensive research project led to a 2020 Census presentation at a Canal Alliance all staff meeting in August of 2018 and a countywide census awareness event called Make Marin Count held in September 2018.

As the project manager for Canal Alliance’s 2020 Census initiative over the past year and the organizer of the Make Marin Count event, I grew my expertise in the decennial census history and current challenges. The event included a keynote speaker from the Advancement Project California organization engaged in census advocacy as well as a panel of experts on the use of census data as the gold standard for statistical population data in the U.S. today. In February 2019, the Marin County Board of Supervisors opted in to state census outreach funding and started the process of planning and implementing census education and outreach activities including the formation of a local complete count committee (LCCC). To ensure everyone is counted in the 2020 Census, an LCCC was created to plan and coordinate outreach efforts across all of Marin County with a focus on its HTC communities. As a member of the Marin County LCCC, I am engaged in a regional cross-sector stakeholder group working
collaboratively to maximize participation in Census 2020, promoting Census jobs, and effectively communicating the importance of this form of civic engagement with the public. LCCC members utilize their local knowledge to coordinate connections and convey messages to their agencies’ networks and service populations among HTC communities across the county.

The research and work product of this capstone project will be used to develop a CBO 2020 Census toolkit for Marin County. Additionally, it forms a foundation in nonprofit advocacy and civic engagement as a career goal outcome of the Masters in Nonprofit Administration. Both Canal Alliance and the Marin County CCC may benefit from the research and recommendations in this report.

**Expert Interviews**

Five expert interviews were conducted and provided insights and common themes for the literature review, data analysis and recommendations in this report. Expert interviews were completed either in person when possible and by video conferencing using the same list of questions with slight variations based on the interviewee’s role and sector. All interviews were scheduled for thirty minutes and two of them went over that time and concluded after sixty minutes. Interview details are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Dobard, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Associate Director of Political Voice</td>
<td>Advancement Project California</td>
<td>February 20, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra Alexandre, Ph.D.</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Community Action Marin</td>
<td>February 27, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose H. Moreno Jimenez</td>
<td>Partnership Specialist</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau</td>
<td>March 8, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Masaoka</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>California Association of Nonprofits</td>
<td>March 11, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Joseph</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Rise Together</td>
<td>March 13, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s creation.
Each expert provided a unique perspective on census outreach by CBOs as trusted messengers for HTC communities. As an advocate and not a trusted messenger, Dobard’s responses focused on state funding as the key to CBOs’ success in HTC outreach. He explained that it's sustainable if those states willing to put the proper investment into it … it should be a joint effort between the state and philanthropy” and Dobard added “... the burden falls mostly on the state because this is something, if we get this right, this benefits the state overall” (personal communication February 20, 2019). The three nonprofit organization leaders addressed strategies for outreach and did not discuss the funding required, but rather the activities and resources essential for effective outreach in their HTC communities.

During the course of the expert interviews, several common topics surfaced supported by the literature reviewed. The sections below recount the responses of the experts to the interview questions and the themes developed to support the research on facilitating effective outreach to the HTC groups that CBOs serve.

**Multiple Touchpoints**

Connecting on more than one occasion over an extended period time with HTC communities was an approach echoed in 2020 Census convenings and during the expert interviews. The concept of multiple touchpoints allows for trusted messengers to convey the importance of HTC participation through individual and group activity contact. Each encounter reinforces the message and may alleviate apprehension or apathy in the HTC communities. For example, speaking to an HTC group at a community event and then returning for other events or providing the local CBO with materials to share with their clients provides the multiple touchpoints that participants find reassuring. The Bureau Partnership Specialist echoed the agency’s goal that “these community-based organizations are the touch point and that's why … the census developed its campaign” and “these are the trusted messengers”. He added that “the groundwork … for the census to be successful … needs to be laid … ears, eyes, hearts opened by the community-based organizations” (personal communication March 8, 2019). The idea of CBOs as a touchpoint was reiterated by two of the nonprofit leaders in their comments as well. Joseph stated that “just looking for those touch points where people are already talking to the populations you’re working with and they could just add this on and then it's still a trusted source in some ways” (personal communication March 13, 2019). “What I want to do is do that education and training well so that we have multiple points of entry and contact ... we already have established
networks of trust in the community” was Alexandre’s idea to utilize existing touchpoints between her staff and the HTC groups her organization serves.

**Education and Training for CBO Leadership and Staff**

Alexandre and Dobard agreed on the importance of educating community leaders about the census process and why it matters. From the CBO perspective, Alexandre noted that “there’s two levels of doing outreach ... the perfunctory I have to do this because this is the part of my job and then there’s the going back to educating and training around how this connects to me personally and why I care about this” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). She went on to describe what would help her staff with outreach is “thinking about education in very personal terms” and “providing people with the supports that are the best ... for them in the right languages with very simple, digestible” consistent content (personal communication, February 27, 2019). She also suggested “staff members get information, get trained in a group setting, but also then have support either through a peer buddy or practice sessions” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). Dobard concurred by saying that “it doesn’t take just a grass roots approach; it takes a grass to tops approach which really just involved educating community leaders about what the census is and the importance of it” (personal communications, February 20, 2019).

**Leveraging Existing Networks**

Both Joseph and Alexandre recognized the value of existing networks. Joseph acknowledged that “sources I know, like for instance ... the county health and human services has such a high touch point with the folks that you would want to be helping to count” (personal communication, March 13, 2019). These governmental agencies often provide packets of information for services like CalFresh that could include standard census outreach materials for HTC populations. Alexandre concurs “being very clear about how we can align with others in community giving similar messages, whether that's HHS or the county or whomever it is, and ensuring that we're part of a much larger strategic conversation about those messages and people hearing it from different sources” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). CBOs can leverage those networks to communicate that county agencies are trusted spaces providing information that is accessible to HTC communities. In regards to external communication strategies, Alexandre shares that “one thing I would add ... is utilizing the network of stakeholders that goes beyond the clients we serve” (personal
communication, February 27, 2019). She suggests “a database of contacts across stakeholder groups and making sure that we’re communicating regularly information through those channels” as a way to make use of existing networks in throughout California Counties for census HTC outreach.

**Messaging and Community Building**

Identifying the best message for each HTC population is key to successful outreach. “Depending on our audience, we also talk about the importance of the census, for community building,” stated Dobard when asked about how to motivate the historically undercounted (personal communication, February 20, 2019). Jimenez, the Bureau representative, acknowledges that their national public relations campaign “messaging is not going to be adequate enough to reach ... their community on there, on the ground” (personal communication, March 8, 2019). He also expressed concerned that for the immigrant and refugee communities the citizenship question “was a trap that was set to get you not to show up ... and you need to show that you are a strong community, that you are a vibrant community, that you are an educated community, and then you are an engaged community and then you're not going to fall into that hole that was dug in front of you to fall into” (personal communication, March 8, 2019).

From the CBO leadership perspective, Alexandre asserts that “it will go from being a transactional experience to a relational experience where it's people connecting to people around something that matters in this community” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). Her emphasis on community building as motivation for HTC populations to participate in the count is from her experience with other similar outreach efforts. Dobard’s view is that “organizations are really going to have to be flexible and ready to respond quickly” as “we can anticipate that the political environment is going to shift a lot during that period of time” and “messaging is going to need to be flexible ... and respond promptly and that's where ... helping to quickly develop some messages that respond in the moment and then disseminate for local folks to amplify” (personal communication, February 20, 2019). An established message of community building as a benefit of census participation will support the adaptability trusted messengers will need to respond to the challenging political climate in the months leading up to the decennial census.

Masaoka shared that “there's a lot to learn from community organizers who have a lot of experience with going door-to-door and phone calling ... so phone banking would be another option” (personal communication, March 11, 2019). She added that messages must be positive and believes that right now the overall message is negative
even though activists think they are saying something positive. Joseph spoke to the collective action aspect of census outreach by CBOs. She explained that “it's more around a specific activity that you're trying to complete and aligning resources and energy to complete it” and recommended “having the right people in the room and having every single person in the room be clear about what their role is going to be” (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

**Reason’s to Participate**

Alexandre and Joseph both expressed the need to articulate the relevance of the census on the lives of the HTC populations. Alexandre provided a list of questions for an individual potentially from a community that is not going to be represented by this survey to help them understand the impact of the census. Joseph adds another question focusing on direct impact to family and community of HTC populations. Tapping into the meaning and impact of the census to the individuals and families served by CBOs surfaced during all of the expert interviews.

Suggests questions to ask when thinking about HTC outreach:

- Why should this matter to the people we serve?
- How is this going to improve their lives and the lives of their family and their neighbors?
- What are the potential impacts if this isn't taken seriously?
- How can they relate to this in a place that connects to their values?
- How do I find spaces of making meaning so that I can talk as a knowledgeable, trusted partner?

Various 2020 Census studies, articles, and websites provide similar lists of reasons for trusted messengers to use to motivate HTC participation. When I shared the list with the expert interviewees, they validated them and cautioned that these reasons should be used in conjunction with an alignment to the HTC populations’ values on personal, familial and community levels. Joseph suggested using whatever language is needed to encourage participation. For example, talk about census as a public health issue if that is what people care about. Dobard and Alexandre highlighted civic duty, constitutional mandate, representation in local government, tax dollar allocation, and enforcement of civil rights laws as powerful reasons that may resonate with the HTC population. Dobard added that the message of “making sure you have fair lines that are drawn that reflect the communities that are actually there increase the likelihood that you'll have representation that is attentive to the needs of the community in counties
that are adversely affected by racial disparity” (personal communication, February 20, 2019).

**Tool Kit Requirements**

A question about the viability of a CBO toolkit was posed to all of the expert interviewees. Masaoka recommended, “I think this when people have some activity that they can do now, they feel better about it” (personal communication, March 11, 2019). She felt that awareness alone was not compelling enough for participants. Masaoka’s idea is being used on the NALEO Census website with its Hágase Contar campaign (NALEO Educational Fund, n.d.). The Hágase Contar landing page provides a call to action where anyone can make a pledge to be counted and receive 2020 Census updates.

Joseph and Alexandre mentioned different forms of storytelling to motivate census participation. Alexandre thought “a story and anecdote about something that's meaningful to an individual to share on social media, to share our own stories that are coming out ... sort of testimonials around the advocacy” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). “An idea just popped into my head about the use of casual ... videos of just people saying, yes, I'm going to be counted” and “use ... of technology and not just another flyer that might catch people's attention” (personal communication, March 13, 2019) came from Joseph. She also emphasized that materials created for outreach should be easily accessible with guidance on what to expect on the census survey. Alexandre also posed questions about what is the right collateral to share, one-page handout or talking points card that facilitates outreach in “clear, concise, consistent” language (personal communication, February 27, 2019).

Training CBO staff surfaced as a topic during discussions around a CBO outreach toolkit. Education and training of CBO staff and volunteers regarding the 2020 Census community impact and messaging are key to the successful roll-out of a toolkit. Alexandre pointed out that the “final piece is really around this training component ... places where people in the county know we are committed to this can bring people to get the right kind of training to align everyone around the ... chosen ... messages” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). She expanded this component to include ideas about what facts and questions are used to engage people in small group training settings where the stage is being set for this work and the goal is to give people data. For her organization, Alexandre wants staff to know what the message is that HTC clients care most about. Her ideal is that staff and volunteers know and understand why
they should care and how the connection to their story will make them the most powerful advocates they can be.

Survey method was another topic covered in the expert interviews. Response to the question of how CBOs think survey collection procedures will impact census participation in hard to count communities was consistent among the interviewees. Alexandre summed it up by saying “if the vehicle for taking the surveys such as paper helps to ensure people that it's confidential ... to whatever degree around where that information is going, ... how they're evaluating it, I can drop it off in a sealed envelope” (personal communication, February 27, 2019). The Canal Alliance staff expressed a similar sentiment related to all of the government forms they assist our clients with. HTC communities are more likely to comply with a request of personal data from the federal government if they are working with trusted messengers such as staff or volunteers of a CBO. Regardless of the use of an online, paper or phone survey method, the key is receiving support from a trusted person or organization because they will facilitate the use of the method that the client is most comfortable using.

Section 4. Data Analysis

Primary and Secondary Data

The primary data collected from Canal Alliance through interviews with leadership and a focus group with frontline staff provided a lens with which to analyze secondary data from the Bureau. Additionally, I drew upon my own work as a member of the Marin County CCC to review the census research evaluating the differential undercount, why it is occurring and what can be done to decrease it in 2020. While the primary data provided insight, it was not sufficient to draw conclusions for the broader objective of the research. As mentioned earlier, census data is widely viewed as the gold standard for statistical population data. Four Bureau reports provided the data to answer the research questions and contributed to the recommendations to increase the efficacy of Marin County CBOs in HTC outreach in the upcoming decennial census.

The Census Bureau 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study (CBAMS) Survey was administered by mail and internet between February 20, 2018 and April 17, 2018 to a sample of households across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Adults (i.e., 18 years or older) were eligible to take the survey, which was offered in English and Spanish. Approximately 17,500 people responded to the survey, which was then weighted to be representative of all households in the United States. The survey responses were used to compare barriers, attitudes, knowledge and
motivators related to participation in the 2020 Census across demographic characteristics, with a focus on differences in race, age, gender, education, and country of birth. This report’s analysis spotlights the race and country of birth results. The 2020 CBAMS Survey was used to answer the following research questions:

1. Who intends to respond to the 2020 Census?
2. Where do gaps in knowledge about the census exist?
3. What barriers would potentially prevent people from completing the 2020 Census?
4. What would potentially motivate people to complete the 2020 Census?

The Census Bureau 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study Focus Group Final Report findings represent data from 42 focus groups conducted among racial and ethnic minorities, those with low internet proficiency, young people who recently moved, rural residents and people at risk of low self-response (Evans, Levy, Miller-Gonzalez, Vines, Girón, Walejko, Bates & Trejo, 2019). The citizenship question was proposed during the fielding and attitudes regarding the announcement are included in the report. Focus groups were comprised of individuals considered at risk of underrepresentation in the 2020 CBAMS Survey. The focus groups convened between March 14 and April 19, 2018 (Evans et al., 2019). Focus groups were conducted in the native language of the participants, which included English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Vietnamese and were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. Focus group data was collected and stored in compliance with the Bureau’s Title 13 data security standards.

“The 2020 CBAMS Focus Groups were designed to provide insight into these questions among audiences that will not be well-represented in the quantitative component of the study” (Evans et al., 2019, p. 2). Additionally, the focus groups addressed topics such as (a) community or cultural experiences that are unique to certain audiences (b) familiarity and understanding of the census, including how to interpret key terms in the census; (c) household arrangements among target audiences to better understand motivators and barriers (Evans et al., 2019). Research questions from CBAMS Focus Group include:

1. What themes and messages should drive communications directed at various audiences, including rural and urban residents and racial/ethnic/language groups, to increase participation in the 2020 Census?
2. What motivators should be leveraged to encourage participation in the 2020 Census among audiences?
3. What barriers to 2020 Census participation exist among audiences?
4. What information is effective to inform audiences and address misconceptions about the 2020 Census?

During the audience recruitment process, potential participants were screened for low-response characteristics using a set of questions. Participants received an additional point towards eligibility if they self-identified as non-white. Bureau research has consistently found renter status to be the most important predictor of response rates and this factor also increased eligibility for focus group participants. By accepting only individuals with a combination of risk factors, a range of views was represented within each target audience (Evans et al., 2019).

Another study used in research for this report took place earlier than the prior two studies, which is significant because it was conducted to meet the strategic goals and objectives of making fundamental changes to the design, implementation, and management of the decennial Census (Census Bureau, 2016). The 2020 Census Research and Testing 2012 National Census Test Contact Strategy, Optimizing Self-Response executive summary stated that “This test served as an opportunity to establish baseline response rate indicators that we can continue to monitor as we approach the 2020 Census” (Census Bureau, 2016, p. 4). The research questions for this study were primarily around self-response and survey methods (internet, mail and telephone). The Bureau’s research and planning for the 2020 Census has concentrated on considerable innovations to the design of the data collection methods as determined by the cost drivers of the 2010 Census. The four areas addressed in the study include: reengineering address canvassing, optimizing self-response, utilizing administrative records, and reengineered field operations (Census Bureau, 2016).

The Census Coverage Measurement Estimation Report summarizing the 2010 survey-based coverage estimates for the household population (excluding remote Alaska areas) contributed data related to undercounting based on race and Hispanic origin as well as tenure (rent vs. own home) (Mule, 2012). This report was part of a series of memorandums supplying estimations of census coverage for preparation of subsequent Bureau activities.

In the CBAMS Focus Group study barriers and motivators are organized by their role as either attitudinal or operational influences on census participation. The attitudinal-operational distinction is informed by research in psychology and economics that differentiates between internally and externally influenced behavior on the provision of public goods (as cited in Clark, Kotchen, & Moore, 2003). Attitudinal motivators and barriers are established internally and contain values, beliefs, and attitudes that promote or inhibit census participation. The desire to help one’s community and a fear of repercussions are examples of attitudinal motivators and
barriers. Operational motivators and barriers are external factors that facilitate or impede participation by making it easier or harder. For example, an online census form is easier for younger and more mobile participants but makes self-response more difficult for those with weaker internet skills. The distinction between attitudinal and operational motivators and barriers is used for the development of the census communications campaign. Evans et al. (2019) conclude that attitudinal motivators and barriers affect the content of census outreach aimed at increasing awareness and persuading people to self-respond (p. 24).

**Differential Undercount**

As part of the 2010 Census, the Bureau conducted the Census Coverage Measurement (CCM) survey to assess the quality of the decennial census. The CCM program evaluated the coverage of the 2010 Census and provided information to improve future censuses (Mule, 2012). Table 2 demonstrates the impact of the differential undercount underlying the inaccuracy over the last three decennial census counts. Even though the Hispanic undercount showed improvement between the 1990 and 2000 Census, in 2010 the estimated undercount significantly increased. The Bureau’s own estimate of the net undercount lays the foundation for an outreach campaign that must target the U.S. residents of color both citizens and non-citizens.

**Table 2. Estimates of Percent Net Undercount by Race/Origin Domain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Origin Domain</th>
<th>Estimate (%)</th>
<th>Standard Error (%)</th>
<th>Estimate (%)</th>
<th>Standard Error (%)</th>
<th>Estimate (%)</th>
<th>Standard Error (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Total</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>-0.04*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-1.13*</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>2.07*</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.84*</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>4.57*</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Asian</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2.36*</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian on Reservation</td>
<td>4.88*</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>12.22*</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian off Reservation</td>
<td>-1.95</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.68*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.36*</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.54*</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>4.99*</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table shows the results using the mutually exclusive Race/Origin domain assigned for CCM estimation. For estimates of race alone or race in combination with Hispanic origin, see Table 3. An asterisk (*) denotes a percent net undercount that is significantly different from zero.

- For 1990, Asian or Pacific Islander was a single race/Hispanic Origin Domain. Therefore, for Non-Hispanic Asian and for Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, the net undercount and standard error are repeated.
- For 1990, Al of Reservation was included in the Non-Hispanic White domain. Therefore, the net undercount and standard error for these domains are identical.

Source: Mule, 2012, p.15

**Barriers to Census Participation**

The 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study Survey (2020 CBAMS Survey) was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau’s Communications Research and
Analytics Team (CRAT) and Team Young & Rubicam (Team Y&R) to provide an evidentiary foundation for the 2020 Census IPC operation (McGeeney, Kriz, Mullenax, Kail, Walejko, Vines, Bates & Trejo, 2019). The Bureau’s operational plan for the decennial census included the development of a research-based communications plan with motivating self-response as its primary objective. The Bureau conducted this research based on the belief that data on the attitudes, barriers, knowledge, and motivators of the overall population informs a broader approach for the 2020 Census outreach campaign and provides information on group differences to be utilized in creating targeted messaging and advertising. McGreeney et al. wanted to answer the question regarding what barriers would prevent people from completing the census. Their analysis revealed five categories of barriers that might prevent people from participating in the census. These findings provide the foundation for an outreach model that can be used by CBO’s in their local communities to develop relevant messaging to motivate HTC population participation in 2020.

The 2020 CBAMS Survey began with the question of who intends to respond to the decennial census. Variations were observed in survey respondents’ reported intent to respond to the census based on their English proficiency, their proficiency in using the internet, and whether they rent or own their home (McGreeney et al., 2019). Of householders with English proficiency defined as those who speak English “very well”, 68 percent reported they were more likely to respond to the census compared to 55 percent of those without English proficiency. Similarly, 69 percent of householders who use the internet at least once a week reported being “extremely likely” or “very likely” to fill out a census form, compared to 54 percent of those who access the internet less frequently. Finally, 71 percent of homeowners were more likely to report a high likelihood of responding than renters at 60 percent.

The first of the category of barriers is concerns about data privacy and confidentiality. “Roughly a quarter of respondents were concerned about the confidentiality of answers to the 2020 Census, but racial and ethnic minorities were significantly more concerned about confidentiality than Non-Hispanic (NH) Whites” (McGreeney et al., 2019, p.2). Fear of repercussions was another barrier with roughly a quarter of respondents indicating concerns that their personal information would be used against them. “NH Asians, householders not proficient in English, and those born outside of the U.S. were the most concerned” (McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 2). A pervasive distrust in all levels of government surfaced as another barrier. Distrust in government was high in all categories, not just HTC populations with the highest levels among NH small-sample races, NH Whites, NH Blacks, U. S. citizens, and people who are proficient in English. Another barrier was a lack of efficacy. Many did not feel it matters whether they are personally counted in the 2020 Census, with young residents less likely
to believe it matters if they are counted. The belief that completing the census would not benefit them personally is a factor and “across almost all demographic characteristics, more people predicted that answering the census could bring benefits to their community than to them personally” (McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 2).

The Bureau conducted a CBAMS focus group study in conjunction with the survey study. Qualitative and quantitative data from both studies suggests that the dominant barrier to participation in the 2020 Census is a lack of understanding of the purpose and process of the census. The focus groups uncovered that a lack of understanding is associated with several negative attitudes toward the census, including apathy, privacy concerns, fear of repercussions, and general distrust of government (Evans et al., 2019). In the quantitative survey data, certain demographic characteristics, including low levels of education, being young, and being of racial or ethnic minority groups, are related to low levels of intent to self-respond to the decennial census (McGreeney et al., 2019). The focus groups, in turn, provided deeper and more specific insights than could be obtained through the survey on minority demographic groups and audiences at risk of low self-response (Erdman & Bates, 2017).

Figure 8 displays complete list of the barriers identified from the CBAMS survey and focus groups combined. Before the focus groups were held the researchers hypothesized eleven potential barriers based on the survey results. Upon reflection of the focus group results, an additional thirteen barriers to census participation emerge. The data suggest that the greatest barriers to participation in the 2020 Census are attitudinal and include a lack of knowledge about the census, apathy toward the census, confidentiality and privacy concerns, fear of repercussions—which encompasses the inclusion of the citizenship question—and a general distrust of government (Evans et al., 2019). Additionally, operational barriers identified included language issues and fear of frauds or scams. The data also suggests that lack of general knowledge of the purpose, content, and execution of the census is relatively limited, and there are substantial barriers to self-response associated with this lack of knowledge.
Figure 8. Hypothesized and Emergent Barriers to Census Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesized Barriers</th>
<th>Emergent Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that answers may be shared with internal Revenue Service (IRS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Department of Homeland Security (DHS).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of awareness that info will be kept confidential.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about confidentiality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulties responding due to displacement following a natural disaster.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that information will not be safe and protected.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that information might be used to find undocumented immigrants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that information might be used to find people who have not paid their taxes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that information might help the FBI and police keep track of people who break the law.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear that information might be used to single out certain racial/ethnic groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Natural disasters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about privacy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear of repercussions for the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear of frauds and scams.*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- General distrust of government. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Apathy toward participation due to an inaccurate count in general.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Apathy toward participation due to an inaccurate count in 2020 specifically.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear of self-incrimination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Limited awareness of the census.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived lack of tangible benefits.*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about potential misuse of data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Natural disasters (e.g., Hurricane Maria) pre and Hurricane Maria companions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about online data security.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about safety and security in the provision of personal information. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“Fear of frauds and scams was more prevalent when discussing completing the census form, either by hand, scantron, or online. Concerns about confidentiality was more of a concern about when the Census Bureau already has their information and what the Bureau is able to do with it.”

Source: Evans et al., 2019, p. 38

Confidentiality and Privacy Concerns

Evans et al. define privacy as freedom from intrusion into one’s personal information and matters and confidentiality as the safeguarding of individual data from disclosure to third parties (2019). Across focus groups, concerns about privacy and data confidentiality were often mentioned as reasons for not responding to the census. In discussing confidentiality concerns, many participants said they did not know what the Bureau did with the information it collected. Some participants, especially in the Spanish (U.S. Mainland), Non-Hispanic Pacific Islander (NHPI), Chinese, and Vietnamese groups “feared the Bureau would share this information with other government agencies to find undocumented people” (Evans et al., 2019, p. 42). Figure 9 shows overall respondents’ concerns about who would have access to their personal data from participation in the census.
Figure 9. Concern About Confidentiality of Answers to the 2020 Census

Confidentiality and privacy concerns for the survey population was measured at 28 percent, with Hispanic groups almost twice as concerned as White respondents, as seen in Figure 10. The second largest race group surveyed, Hispanics, expressed that they did not think the Bureau would keep their information confidential and this was captured before the citizenship question was proposed as an addition in 2020.

Figure 10. All Racial and Hispanic-Origin Groups More Concerned That Bureau Would Not Keep Their Answers to the Census Confidential

Source: McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 39

Source: McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 40
In discussing confidentiality concerns, many participants said they did not know what the Bureau did with the information it collected. Some participants, especially in the Spanish, NHPI, Chinese, and Vietnamese groups, feared the Bureau would share this information with other government agencies to find undocumented people, a common misconception (Evans et al., 2019). Participants were often confused about the scope of the census.

Fear of Repercussions

According to Evans et al. (2019), “some focus group participants expressed concern that filling out the census could have negative repercussions, most commonly in the form of punishment for legal violations, the loss of funding for their community, or arbitrary government action” (p. 42). Most of the fears expressed by immigrants were concrete and affected them and their families personally. For example, people feared they might face eviction or no longer receive government benefits if they shared how many people were living in their house. Figure 11 displays the higher propensity for Non-White respondents to fear their census information will be shared with other government agencies resulting in negative consequences for them and their families.

Figure 11. All Racial and Hispanic Origin Groups Were More Concerned That Bureau Would Share Their Answers with Other Government Agencies

For others, the repercussions were not well defined, but seemed to be linked to the participants’ ethnicity. Middle Eastern North African (MENA) and Spanish (U.S. Mainland) group participants who felt they were politically targeted expressed a
palpable fear that the government would use their census information against them (Evans et al., 2019). Evans et al. (2019) also shared that “Some participants in other audiences noted that while their group was not currently under government scrutiny, it could be in the future” (p. 43) which speaks not only to HTC communities but to all census participants feelings about sharing information with the government.

As mentioned earlier, the possible addition of a citizenship question to the decennial census occurred after the survey and during the focus groups. Evans et al. (2019) noted that “Participants in the Spanish and MENA groups, and to a lesser extent the Chinese and Vietnamese groups, feared that answering the citizenship question might lead to deportation” (p. 43). The prospect of a citizenship question escalated the belief that immigrants’ answers would be used against their community in the form of limited funding or against themselves personally, in the form of punishment.

This trend was further validated by the data on the rate of concern for people who are not proficient in English. McGreeney et al. (2019) reported that “Thirty-nine percent of respondents who were not proficient in English reported that they were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” that their answers would be used against them” (p. 45). Figure 12 data indicates that almost twice as many people who are not English proficient believe census data will be used against them and their families.

Figure 12. Respondents Who Were Not Proficient in English Were More Concerned That Their Answers Would Be Used Against Them

Similarly, Figure 13 shows that individuals born outside the U.S. were significantly more concerned that their answers to the census would be used against
them than those born in the U.S. (McGreeney et al., 2019). The data indicates a substantial fear among foreign-born residents that the Bureau will use census data in ways that are harmful for them, their families and communities.

**Figure 13. Respondents Who Were Born Outside the United States Were More Concerned That Their Answers Would be Used Against Them**

![Graph showing concern levels](image)

Source: McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 46

**Distrust in Government**

Along with confidentiality concerns and fear of repercussions, it was clear that these participants were suspicious of the Bureau and the actual decennial census process. Distrust in government was a prominent theme in many focus groups, namely among the Rural, MENA, and Black or African American audiences (Evans et al., 2019). Participants were quick to question the trustworthiness of the government in general, including the Bureau, alluding to a decreased quality of life over the past decade as well as increased cultural tension. Even when informed of the Title 13 protections of their data that keeps it confidential, participants said they could not trust the government would not use census data against them in the future (Evans et al., 2019).

The inclusion of a citizenship question announced March 26, 2018 by the U.S. Department of Commerce intensified the distrust of government. The data collected after suggests that the question may impede participation among audiences with recent immigration history. The significance of this barrier varies based on a person’s beliefs about the question’s purpose, their trust in the government to keep their information confidential, and beliefs about whether their ethnic group is the subject of politically motivated targeting. This barrier became the highest among those individuals who
believed that the purpose of the question is to find undocumented immigrants and that their information will be shared across agencies leading to deportation of the ethnic groups currently facing an inhospitable political environment. As one MENA participant stated, “[The information from a citizenship question would be used] to figure out who they’ve got to kick out...I’m being dead serious” (Evans et al., 2019, p.52). Other purposes mentioned for the question included gathering the data for purely statistical reasons and for determining the size of the voting-eligible population. Evans et al. (2019) recounted that “Some believed the question would help calculate the amount of money spent providing social services to undocumented immigrants, with an eye toward reducing this waste” (p. 55). Figure 14 summarizes the components of the census participation barrier associated with adding a citizenship question.

Figure 14. Potential Extent of Citizenship Question as Barrier to Participation in the 2020 Census on Perceived Risks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Purpose: Find Undocumented Immigrants</th>
<th>Confidentiality: Data Shared to Facilitate Deportation</th>
<th>Political Targeting: Community and Residents of All statuses at Risk</th>
<th>Potential Extent of Barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA (Women)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA (Men)</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHPI</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish (U.S. Mainland)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Evans et al., 2019, p. 53

Evans et al. (2019) stated that “Simply put, they did not believe the government would do the right thing with their data” (p.68). As a result, participants are skeptical when the Bureau promises confidentiality of their personal data and are not convinced that the government would not use their answers against them. The data gathered since the announcement of the possible addition of a citizenship question suggests that even if the Supreme Court rules to remove the citizenship question, the damage to trust in the federal government is done. This may be the most difficult barrier for trusted messengers to overcome, regardless of whether the citizenship question is included.
Lack of efficacy

McGreeney et al. (2019) reported that “Many did not feel that it matters whether they are counted in the 2020 Census” (p. 59). CBAMS participants who were simply apathetic said they would not fill out the form because they did not think it was important. In general, this group believed nothing would happen if they abstained and expressed their thoughts without emotion (Evans et al., 2019). They had little faith that individuals and their responses to the census would influence the government. A lack of knowledge about the purpose of the census contributes to apathy about participation, especially among the least politically efficacious. Many focus group participants did not believe it mattered if they were personally counted in the census, let alone their own families. Taking part in the census where the benefits were unclear or any benefits communicated were unlikely to touch their communities (Evans et al., 2019).

Benefit of Census Participation

The final barrier category focuses on the recognition of harm that may come to a respondent’s community from census participation. When asked whether they believed answering the 2020 Census could benefit or harm their community, 54 percent said that they believed the census would benefit their community (McGreeney et al., 2019). In response to the potential effects on their own community, 62 percent of Hispanics acknowledged that answering the census could benefit their community. Figure 15 shows the significant difference among races and Hispanic origin groups on the perceived benefit to the community from participating in the 2020 Census. This finding surfaces an opportunity to counterbalance the concerns of confidentiality, fear of repercussions and distrust of government and shifting the theme of the potential negative individual effects of the census to a more positive community impact. McGreeney et al. (2019) noted that “Hispanics (48 percent) were significantly more likely than all other race and Hispanic origin groups to perceive a personal benefit from answering the 2020 Census” (p. 55). The findings related to Hispanic origin groups perceptions of benefit from census participation provide a strong starting point to develop motivational messaging from an identified barrier.
Motivators

What would potentially motivate people to complete the census? The data indicated that funding for public services was a top motivator across all focus groups. Only 45 percent of respondents knew that the census is used to determine how much government funding communities receive (McGreeney et al., 2019). Heads of household thought public services funding was the most important reason to complete the census. Across all of the focus groups, hospitals, fire departments, police departments, and roads and highways were identified as the most important public services. When these community-oriented uses of census information were combined into a single measure, they were the most popular with those who were younger, non-white, not English proficient, and less educated (McGreeney et al., 2019).

Community funding surfaced as the primary motivator of census self-response. For some audience groups, local and tangible evidence of community funding was a necessary condition for them to participate. For many, community funding was intertwined with the idea of a better future for their community and their children. More skeptical groups stated that trusted voices and organizations with deep roots in their community could facilitate their participation by providing information both about community funding and the census process more generally with assurance of its safety and confidentiality (Evans et al., 2019). These findings show that community funding is
a more compelling motivator when it is connected to three things: information about the impact of the census, tangible and local evidence of community benefits, and the concept of a better future for the community.

The qualitative and quantitative data both indicate that, although there are important differences across demographic groups, funding for public services is a key motivator across all groups. McGreeney et al. (2019) conclude that “Focus groups, in particular, showed that participants might be persuaded of the importance and purpose of the census if they make the connection between completing a census form and the possibility of an increase in funding or support for their community, notably in support of critical community institutions, organizations, and services” (p.5). Figure 16 discloses the strength of the community-oriented motivators to census participation.

![Figure 16. Forced-Choice Community Oriented Motivators Combined](image)

As mentioned earlier when reviewing data on census participation barriers, the survey provided hypothesized barriers and the focus group enhanced that list with emergent barriers. This led to a more expansive understanding of participant response and how to best use the data for 2020 outreach development. Similarly, hypothesized and emergent motivators resulted from the survey and focus groups. Table 3 lists the motivators to help us “understand factors that were expected to affect self-response versus those that were unforeseen and unexpected” (Evans et al., 2019, p. 24).
Again, attitudinal and operational motivators were identified to support outreach efforts. All motivators identified from the data are listed below:

**Attitudinal:**
- Community funding
- Civic responsibility/duty
- Desire to know more about the census and its impact
- Better future for community
- Desire for representation
- Evidence of community benefits

**Operational:**
- Trusted voices
- Information resources
- Online option for census

The data revealed that the most powerful motivator for all audiences is knowing that the 2020 Census will help determine funding for their communities, particularly for widely enjoyed services such as schools, hospitals, and fire departments. The discussions indicate that community funding is most effective as a motivator when connected to the following ideas (Evans et al., 2019):
• Knowledge of the census and its impact – For community benefits in the form of funding to motivate participation, people need to learn of and believe in the census’ role in resource distribution. Many focus group participants simply did not know about this role of the census, and others were skeptical about its ability to deliver on the promise.

• Evidence of community benefits – For community funding to be persuasive, there must be tangible results, most notably in their local communities. Participants also consistently emphasized the need for specific examples.

• Better future for the community – Community funding gains currency in its connection to a better future, both for the community and future generations. It provides emotional heft to the more utilitarian appeal of funding and endows census participation with more purpose.

Finally, among those most distrustful and skeptical participants, “community-based organizations and advocates were often regarded as potential catalysts for participation by providing information and assurance about the census and the importance of participation” (Evans et al., 2019, p. 27).

Message

Funding for public service was the most popular motivator overall, with community-oriented motivators most popular with younger people, nonwhites, those who were not English proficient, and the less educated (McGreeney et al., 2019). Not all types of funding received equal support with the majority of participants focused on the delivery of broadly consumed public goods (Evans et al., 2019). The power of community funding as a motivator depends on people seeing the tangible results for themselves. Evans et al., (2019) relayed that “Many participants said there should be hard evidence to prove that filling out a census form helps the community” (p. 29).

For community funding to be a motivator, there must be knowledge of the census and its role in informing the allocation of resources. The data indicated that many participants said they did not know much about the census or the benefits it provides their community. It was also noted that the more specific and local the evidence was, the more effective community funding would likely be as a motivator (Evans et al., 2019). Linking community funding to a better future may give participants an emotional basis for completing the census and enable participation with more meaning and purpose to overcome fear or apprehension.

It is clear that those who are harder to count or persuade will require more than a simple passing on of information. A central challenge facing the CBOs in outreach is
establishing believability of the information as conveyed in messaging. Speaking to deep personal experiences that suggest to them that their participation will benefit them and their communities is essential along with messaging that provides specific and concrete examples of how the census benefits local communities, now and into the future.

**Survey Instrument**

“The 2020 CBAMS Survey sought to understand respondents’ mode preferences when filling out the census form” (McGreeney et al., 2019, p. 25). This is especially significant due to the debut of a large-scale online self-response option for the 2020 Census. The 2020 Census Research and Testing 2012 National Census Test Contact Strategy, Optimizing Self-Response report presents data on the five experimental contact strategy panels that were tested, all in the presence of an Internet Push methodology. A sample of 80,000 housing units was randomly assigned to one of five Internet content paths and one of six contact and notification strategies. Table 4 shows displays the results of the panel response rates by method.

**Table 4. Self-Response Rates by Panel and Response Mode**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>TQA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Advance letter</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.68)</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td>(0.33)</td>
<td>(0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Absence of advance letter</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.62)</td>
<td>(0.48)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 2nd reminder prior to questionnaire</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td>(0.46)</td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Accelerated questionnaire followed by 2nd reminder</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
<td>(0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Telephone number at initial contact, accelerated questionnaire, and 2nd reminder</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Accelerated questionnaire, content tailored to nonrespondents and 2nd reminder</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
<td>(0.59)</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td>(0.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census Bureau, 2012 National Census Test Contact Strategy Results, 2016, p. 31

The Bureau is committed to using the Internet as a primary response option in the 2020 Census. The 2012 National Census Test Contact Strategy Results report concedes that “much research and testing is needed throughout the next decade to develop and implement a successful, secure, and user-friendly online instrument” (Census Bureau, 2016, p.7). This data demonstrates the promise of leveraging technology to improve the census data collection process. However, while an online
survey may increase participation for some HTC groups such as younger mobile participants, it will decrease participation for others who are concerned with confidentiality, fear of repercussions or do not have access to broadband, a device or the knowledge necessary to complete the census online. The addition of an online option expanded the HTC list from 2010 to include areas with low broadband subscription rates or low/no access to broadband. Even in the Latino immigrant community where smartphones are widely used, if the survey is more difficult to access and complete on a mobile device, the Bureau’s changes will further depress HTC response rates. What will help CBOs manage the complexity of this new survey method?

The data suggest that no single way in which the Bureau contacts people when it is time for the census was preferred by a majority of participants. Participants conveyed preferences about how they wanted to be contacted during the census process such as initial contact, reminders, and ongoing promotions. Mail was preferred by most for the initial contact, although participants indicated that mail alone may not be sufficient. Mail is optimal when supplemented by other outreach methods to ensure that everyone knows about the upcoming census. Participants also suggested reminders via text messages or cell phone push notifications, explaining that nearly everyone has a cell phone. When discussing notifications, participants did not make a connection to privacy concerns. The topic of privacy related to the census came up when discussing completing the questionnaire on a smart phone. Finally, the majority of participants suggested social media platforms as an effective new way to advertise the census, but emphasized the importance of continuing to have a substantial presence on television, radio, and other public spaces (Evans et al., 2019). Recent immigrants or individuals well connected to their ethnic group were the exception to the general feedback given. These groups revealed that concentrating on community-based methods of contact such as trusted information from religious leaders or a community workshop would be more effective.

Evans et al., (2019) reported that “participants wanted a variety of options to complete the census form, allowing them to choose the method most comfortable for them” (p. 61). This brought up concerns surrounding the security of personal information because participants stressed that it is important to know who is requesting their information and for what purpose, regardless of the mode of completion. Alignment of survey method with HTC preferences may ease some of the fear and apprehension felt by these populations.
Trusted Partners

CBOs can show people how Census data guide the provision of important resources to them, such as health care. CBOs that advocate Census participation in the course of their daily work fuel their own success by improving the quality of public data about their communities (NALEO Educational Fund & Latino Community Foundation, 2018). The data suggests census outreach faces significant barriers that ultimately revolve around lack of trust and providing information about information protection policies that alone will not mitigate concerns around privacy and confidentiality. According to Evans et al., (2019) “distrust of government is a more durable attitude and suggests that no message from the Bureau will be believed by those with the strongest levels of distrust” (p. xi). What is encouraging is that the data shows that trusted voices in the community can successfully increase participation among people with the greatest trust-based fears and government disaffection.

Trusted voices and institutions grounded in the community are effective sources of motivation, assurance, and information across audience groups, especially among the audiences most skeptical and distrustful of the government. Examples shared by focus groups included community leaders broadly defined, local politicians, local activists, faith-based organizations, and advocacy organizations (Evans et al., 2019). Participants also cited community-based organizations and education campaigns as potential sources of information on the census. Suggested outreach examples were pop-up information centers in the community, forums at schools, town halls, and educational sessions at the library (Evans et al., 2019). Across the board, non-English speaking groups underscored the need to hear from someone in their primary language. An additional outreach recommendation was educating census participants of possible frauds or scams by ensuring census communications regardless of response options have some type of signifier to indicate their official government status (Evans et al., 2019).

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

Implications

Responses to the 2020 CBAMS Survey revealed that fewer than seven in ten householders plan to participate in the 2020 Census (McGreeney et al., 2019). This is cause for concern because the decennial census is designed to count every person in the United States, and actual response rates are often lower than intended response rates.
The survey also revealed that the public has low levels of familiarity with and knowledge about the census. What people knew about the census was largely limited to the fact that it is used to determine changes in the U.S. population and that it has bearing on the number of congressional representatives each state will have. McGreeney et al. (2019) reported that “People incorrectly believed, or were uncertain, that the census is used to keep track of people who are in the country without documentation or those who have committed a crime” (p. 67).

Census Bureau research has identified HTC communities whose response rates are estimated to be significantly lower than the national average. “Insofar as maintaining a low differential undercount remains a central concern in census planning, our findings suggest that the payoff lies in a mobilization effort targeted to population groups that are typically less likely to participate in the census” (Hillygus et al., 2006, p. 117). Federal, state and local governments are partnering as part of the Bureau’s IPC campaign to use the data on intention to respond and the other attitudes and barriers described in this report to make informed decisions about a variety of aspects of the outreach campaign. The overarching focus of the HTC outreach is promotion of self-response, not only through paid, earned, owned, and social communications, but also in collaboration with CBOs as trusted messengers. This requires an understanding of the purpose of the census and its value to their community, as well as the process for participation. This does not mean simply educating people, but also making sure to reframe census participation as easy, important, and desirable. It is vital that the HTC outreach helps people understand the very specific ways that the census benefits their community and reassures them that participation is safe (McGreeney et al., 2019). It is critical the CBOs identify individuals who are trusted by HTC communities, and train them to mobilize residents to participate in Census 2020. These trusted messengers will be particularly effective for outreach that involves direct contact with community members, such as speaking at community forums, staffing questions assistance centers (QACs), promoting census participation at community events, or conducting canvassing or phone bank “Get-Out-the-Count” efforts (NALEO Educational Fund & Latino Community Foundation, 2018).

The largest barriers to participation in the next decennial census are concerns about data confidentiality, repercussions from participating, pessimism about the efficacy of participating, and distrust in all levels of government. A majority of householders felt that “funding for public services,” such as fire and police departments, hospitals, and roads and highways, was the most important reason to participate in the census. Although community funding emerged as the top reason people said they would participate in the census, less than half of respondents knew that the census was used to determine community funding. This underscores the importance of the IPC’s
CBO outreach plan to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits communities can receive from an accurate enumeration in the 2020 Census. CBOs should also acknowledge the climate of fear and determine how best to address it. Messaging about the value of a complete count for securing resources for schools, health care, and other local needs could resonate alongside messages about hope, participation, and empowerment. Admitting the challenges that the Trump administration has created and framing census participation as a way to fight back with a message that “you should be counted because the Administration does not want you to count” is another consideration (NALEO Educational Fund & Latino Community Foundation, 2018).

The Bureau has placed emphasis on understanding not only the barriers to census self-response, but additionally the motivators in the development of the 2020 Census Integrated Communications Campaign which includes a partnership component to reach HTC populations. The findings from the data analyzed in this report has the following implications for the CBO outreach (Evans et al., 2019):

- A predominant challenge will be to overcome apathy and lack of efficacy. Many HTC individuals experience daily obstacles in their lives; taking the census just doesn’t seem very important to them. For those who believe the political system is unresponsive to them, the challenge is greater. They are hesitant to believe messages that the census will benefit them, their families or their communities.

- It is critical that HTC communities understand the purpose, content, and process of the census. The purpose should be connected to community funding, with specific and concrete examples for each different group how the census benefits their local community.

- Census participation requires framing as vital, desirable, and safe for the HTC community now and for future generations.

- Everyone must be assured and reassured that participation is safe. HTC communities especially need to believe that they will not be asked for information that would compromise their privacy or safety, and that the information that is gathered will not be shared with other government agencies nor used against them in any way.

- The process of completing the census, specifically self-response, should be communicated as accessible, simple, and quick.

- Prevailing government distrust translates into ineffective Census Bureau messaging. It is crucial to have trusted messengers that have community
credibility to deliver a positive message with a greater chance of convincing people that census participation matters, is easy, and is safe.

In order for CBOs to be effective in census outreach for their specific HTC populations, there are three components to consider: collaborative strategy, message development, and outreach methodology. Partnerships and collaborative relationships must exist to develop a compelling and consistent message for each HTC population. This is where the tenants of collective impact or aligned action come into play. In the case of many California counties, a local complete count committee (CCC) has been formed that includes members from government, CBOs, business, education, libraries, faith-based, media, health and human services, and housing organizations. These CCCs form subcommittees or working groups, each focused on one HTC population in the county based on either specific needs such as residents over 65, Latinx, Asian and children under the age of five or geographies such as rural areas with immigrant farmworkers or urban areas that have a large concentration of African Americans. These subcommittees are tasked with developing education and outreach strategies that will be implemented in late 2019 and early 2020. Many California counties are following a similar process that aligns with a collective impact framework. Figure 17 summarizes the components and Figure 18 depicts how CBOs is to engage in aligned action in strategizing with local partners.

Figure 17. Components Required for Effective CBO Census Outreach

![Diagram](image-url)
The next component, message development, utilizes the census data presented in this research project to create messages that will resonate with both trusted messengers and HTC populations. The Opportunity Agenda helps create a message with vision, values, and voice using a social justice communications toolkit, which provides guidance for building your own messages using their recommended value, problem, solution, action (VPSA) structure (Make Your Own VPSA, n.d.). This values-based messaging approach elevates the data that “activates emotions and opens an audience’s hearts and ears to the message” (Make Your Own VPSA, n.d.). Figure 19 below is an example of a 2020 Census message for HTC communities created using the VPSA framework. Utilizing this framework, CBOs can create and refine the messaging that aligns with the values of their HTC groups.
Figure 19. Sample Message Development Based on Opportunity Agenda Framework

Source: Author created

The final component, outreach methodology, is depicted in Figure 20. The design equips CBOs with a comprehensive model that addresses educating staff, training trusted messengers, collaboration with partners, and developing values-based messaging using data on HTC perceived benefits of participation. This model along with the messaging framework will be utilized to create a toolkit for the county CCCs with ready-to-use content and materials to facilitate HTC outreach for CBOs as trusted messengers. CBO professional and support employees often have opportunities to speak and make presentations at public schools, in classes they may be taking, to the personnel at other agencies, and even at community events and Dixon & Rasch (2006) recommend “Creating talking points for staff” or having staff who know how to address the more difficult questions census participation may raise can be very useful in outreach and engagement efforts (p.41).
Recommendations

The recommendations listed below are based on the relevant literature review, Bureau data analysis, expert interviews and other 2020 Census resources available to the public. It is imperative that CBOs are supported in developing a strategic outreach plan before executing on direct outreach activities. The recommendations below were developed in order to successfully get out the count and decrease the risk of a greater HTC undercount by providing CBOs with the backbone support they need as our trusted messengers in this vital and impactful civic engagement endeavor.

1) Invest in CBO staff education and training on the 2020 Census
   a) Create training materials for all CBOs within a county or region
   b) Train champions at each CBO to advance outreach efforts
2) Identify CBO trusted messengers in the community
   a) Utilize digital and face-to-face canvassing to get out the count (GOTC)
   b) Build shared communications hub to support trusted messenger outreach efforts
3) Provide CBOs with outreach toolkits targeted to their HTC group using best practice frameworks
   a) Use Opportunity Agenda Framework to develop messaging
   b) Use Align Action Framework to collaborate on activities and measure progress
Section 6: Conclusions

The decennial census is the most inclusive civic activity in our nation. As the cornerstone of the U. S. democracy, the count determines representation in Congress and the Electoral College, as well as provides 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 engagement 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.

This capstone research is based on the belief that community-based organizations (CBOs) have earned the trust of residents from historically hard-to-count communities and therefore have the potential to meaningfully increase census participation in a challenging environment if provided an effective outreach model. Three research questions were addressed in this report:

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 it be synthesized into a toolkit?

Knowledge gaps are the overarching factor in census participation with the additional barriers identified in the CBAMS survey and focus groups which include apathy and lack of efficacy, privacy concerns, fear of repercussions and distrust of government. Census Bureau findings show that the key motivator to counteract these barriers is promoting the funding for community needs that is determined by accurate census data. CBOs in their role as trusted messengers in the community can increase census participation in HTC communities by connecting census participation to support for local communities, informing the public on the census’ scope, purpose, and process and engaging all community trusted voices in outreach.

Collaboration strategy, message development and outreach methodology were presented as the main components of a toolkit developed to support CBOs in 2020 Census education and outreach activities. The CBO toolkit addresses both messaging
and outreach strategy, giving organizations with broad access to HTC populations and limited resources a way to use their trusted voice to amplify the needs of the marginalized communities they serve. Practicing inclusive civic engagement fortifies the values of the nonprofit sector of respect, dignity, diversity, and inclusion of those they sever and the greater society. The 2020 Census is not only the cornerstone of our democracy; it is the foundation this nation’s social sector.
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Author’s Bio

Ms. McNally is the Strategic Initiatives Manager at Canal Alliance, a local community-based organization that works to break the cycle of generational poverty in the Latino immigrant community.

She is a strategic management professional focusing on helping nonprofit organizations achieve their goals. Ms. McNally leverages best practices and lends her expertise from multiple sectors to ensure mission-driven enterprises deliver on their vision in a sustainable and scalable way for high impact outcomes.

Specifically, as Canal Alliance's Strategic Initiatives Manager, Ms. McNally’s leadership provides a catalyst for change and growth. With more than 20 years of project and resource management experience, she’s passionate about building and leading effective teams to reach desired outcomes. Areas of focus include strategic plan implementation and reporting, advocacy, 2020 Census outreach, and civic engagement.

As an Accenture alumnus, Ms. McNally utilizes this career experience to solve her clients' toughest challenges by providing exceptional services in strategy, consulting, technology and operations to both for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

Ms. McNally also previously worked in the customer experience management software industry where she envisioned and oversaw large-scale projects. She motivated, organized and encouraged collaboration within the organization to ensure teams understood and worked toward performance goals together.

In addition to raising a family and evolving in her career, Ms. McNally engaged in a variety of volunteer capacities including serving on the boards for nonprofits After School All Stars Bay Area Chapter and Ross Valley Nursery School. She also contributed through various roles at Girl Scouts of Northern California, Girls on the Run, Kentfield Schools and the Linus Project.

Ms. McNally holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance from The University of Texas. She is currently pursuing a Master of Nonprofit Administration at The University of San Francisco, to be completed May 2019.