



CENSUS 2020 TOOLKIT

INTRO: TOOLKIT FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE CENSUS

The census is required by the U.S. Constitution and getting it right is important to everyone. A fair and accurate census, and the collection of useful, objective data about our nation's people, housing, economy, and communities generally, is among the most important civil rights issues of our day.

An accurate census:

- Directly affects our nation's ability to ensure equal representation and equal access to more than \$600 billion a year in important governmental resources for all Americans;
- Helps federal agencies monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more; and
- Assists state and local leaders in identifying and addressing emerging needs for health care, education, housing, food and income security, rural access to broadband, and other services.

The 2020 Census is already underway, as decisions are being made now by Congress and the Trump administration that will determine whether the Census Bureau has the resources it needs to do the job well. Unfortunately, the census is facing a number of challenges that could put a fair and accurate count in serious peril.

- The Government Accountability Office has deemed the 2020 Census a "high risk" federal program over concerns about the Census Bureau's "ability to conduct a cost-effective enumeration."
- Congress' failure to allocate sufficient funds for the Census Bureau has already caused significant delays, cancellations, and cutbacks in census planning activities, including the testing of complex technology.
- The Census Bureau's director, John Thompson, has resigned, leaving the Census Bureau without a permanent director with the clout to advocate for adequate funding and comprehensive surveys before Congress and the administration, and without an experienced hand to oversee the nation's largest peacetime mobilization.

Congress and the Trump administration bear the responsibility to help the Census Bureau navigate difficult times. A cost-effective census is a praiseworthy goal, but saving money cannot come at the expense of an inclusive census that accurately reflects our population. The census has historically missed certain communities—including communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children—at disproportionately high rates. Being undercounted deprives these communities of equal political representation and private and public resources. The Census Bureau needs the resources to get the count right.

This toolkit aims to help civil rights and census advocates have educated and meaningful conversations with important audiences who can impact the efficacy of the 2020 Census –

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

Last Updated: July 10, 2017

INTRO: TOOLKIT FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE CENSUS

including elected officials, community leaders, members of the media, and opinion leaders at all levels. Everyone must be told about the importance of supporting a full and accurate 2020 Census.

In this toolkit please find:

- Fact Sheet: The Census and Civil Rights
- Fact Sheet: Census Accuracy and The Undercount: Why It Matters; How It's Measured
- Counting for Dollars: Why it Matters
- Talking Points: Effective Messaging About the Census
- FAQ: Local Update of Census Address (LUCA) Program
- Op-ed: Penny wise, pound foolish: 2020 Census needs funding now
- Sample op-ed
- Sample letters to the editor

For more information or support for your 2020 Census campaign, contact:

Karely Hernandez, communications manager, The Leadership Conference Education Fund, hernandez@civilrights.org

Sergio Lopez, field manager, The Leadership Conference Education Fund, lopez@civilrights.org

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

Last Updated: July 10, 2017

FACT SHEET: THE CENSUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Why is the 2020 Census a Civil Rights Issue?

Fair, proportionate voting representation in our democracy depends on valid census data. That's why the census is required by the U.S. Constitution.

Federal agencies rely on census and American Community Service (ACS) data to monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more.

Census and ACS data also determine federal funding for health care, education, housing, food and income security, rural access to broadband, and other services.

Communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children are all at risk of being missed at disproportionately high rates. Being undercounted deprives already vulnerable communities of fair representation and vital community resources.

Why is the Census an Urgent Issue Right Now?

2020 may seem far off, but decisions being made now will determine whether planning and funding are sufficient to do the job right.

Decisions made this year by the Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, and other policymakers will have a huge impact on the accuracy of the 2020 census and the effective collection and broad dissemination of ACS data.

Congress must oversee census planning and allocate enough money to ensure that the 2020 census counts everyone fairly and accurately, including historically undercounted population groups.

First Principles for a Fair and Accurate 2020 Census

Decisions about the conduct of the 2020 census must be driven primarily by the need to get the count right.

Congress, which has the constitutional responsibility for the census, must provide sufficient oversight and funding to support a robust and transparent planning process.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

Last Updated: February 14, 2017

FACT SHEET: THE CENSUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Policymakers must consider the value of obtaining accurate census data, as well as the dire consequences of failing to reach hard-to-count populations and produce high-quality data needed to enforce civil rights protections.

Needs, Stakes, and Risks

The Census Bureau must have a significant “ramp-up” in funding to build the IT and operational infrastructure in time for the 2020 census dress rehearsal – called the End-to-End Census Test – in 2018. Failure to fully fund these critical activities now will jeopardize an accurate count and could increase census costs by billions of dollars.

The American Community Survey (ACS)— the only source of reliable, comparable community-level data for the implementation of civil rights laws and for the analysis of emerging needs of neighborhoods, which helps community leaders plan for the future, and locate new schools, recreational areas, hospitals, transportation, and police and fire departments— is threatened by proposed budget cuts and efforts to make participation optional. The ACS is the ongoing survey that updates information for all communities between censuses.

Any new approaches adopted by the Census Bureau (including an Internet response option, use of administrative records, and revised census questions on race and ethnicity) must help ensure that the 2020 census and the ACS collect and produce the most accurate, detailed, and useful information about the nation's diverse population. The 2020 census must be as or more accurate than the 2010 Census.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

Last Updated: February 14, 2017



2020 CENSUS FACT SHEET

CENSUS ACCURACY AND THE UNDERCOUNT *Why It Matters; How It's Measured*

Background

At a macro level, the 2010 Census appeared to be close to perfect. The Census Bureau reported a *net national overcount* of 0.01% in 2010, a number not statistically different from zero. Similarly, no state had a statistically significant net undercount, according to Census Bureau estimates. But the apparent precision can be misleading and doesn't tell the whole story. This Fact Sheet discusses what we know about census accuracy and why it matters to funders and their grantees.

The Census Bureau's goal is to "count everyone once, only once, and in the right place." If the census missed relatively equal percentages of people in *all* communities and demographic groups — urban, suburban, and rural; poor and wealthy; predominantly White and predominantly Black or Latino; young children and senior citizens — the result might not be 100% accurate, but at least it would be *fair* for key purposes for which census figures are used: allocation of political representation and government funding for vital services and programs. However, scientific measurements of census accuracy since 1940 have shown a persistent, *disproportionate* undercount of certain population subgroups, which skews the results in favor of some communities over others.

Measuring Census Accuracy

The Census Bureau has produced estimates of census accuracy going back to the 1940 count, when analysts discovered that 453,000 more men registered for the draft that year than were counted in the census. The 1940 census missed three percent of men age 21 to 35, but 13 percent of Black men in that age group. This disparity was the first objective evidence of what we now call the *differential undercount* — a disproportionate undercounting of some population subgroups, most notably people of color, young children, and renters (a proxy for lower income households), compared to non-Hispanic Whites, older Americans, and homeowners.

The first measurements of census accuracy, called *Demographic Analysis*, compared independent estimates of the population with the enumeration results. The independent figures, which the Census Bureau still compiles, are built primarily using birth, death, and immigration records, as well as emigration and undocumented immigration estimates and Medicare data. Later, the Bureau developed a second check on accuracy called a *post-enumeration survey*, or PES. This statistically representative, independent survey is conducted after major census operations are finished; the results are then matched, household by household, with the original census results, to determine how many people were missed, counted twice, or counted in the wrong place. Those findings are then applied to demographically similar census blocks across the country to derive broader estimates

of undercounts and overcounts. The survey specifics and title have changed each decade since 1980, but the underlying methodology remains the same.¹ The PES produces accuracy estimates by race and ethnicity, age cohorts, gender, and housing tenure (owner vs. renter), as well as for key census operations, such as bilingual mailing and Update/Enumerate areas. The measures are available for the nation, states, and large cities and counties. However, no State had a net under/overcount that was statistically different from zero in 2010. In general, accuracy figures below the national level should be cited with caution, if at all, because of PES sample size limitations.

The Differential Undercount

If the census missed relatively equal percentages of people in *all* communities and demographic groups — urban, suburban, and rural; poor and wealthy; predominantly White and predominantly Black or Latino; young children and seniors — the result might not be 100% accurate, but at least it would be *fair* for key purposes for which census figures are used: allocation of political representation and government funding for vital services and programs. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

Demographic analysis and Post-Enumeration Surveys both show that the census misses racial and ethnic minorities, low-income households (indicated by the proxy of homeowner vs. renter), and children (especially ages 0-4), at disproportionately high rates.² In 2000 and 2010, non-Hispanic Whites were actually *overcounted*, according to the bureau's analysis. The *gap* between census accuracy for non-Hispanic Whites and for all other race groups, between low- and high-income households, is called the *differential undercount*. It is this disparity that deprives underserved communities of political power, government resources and, often, private sector investment.

For example, based on the PES results, the 2010 Census missed 2.06 percent of the Non-Hispanic Black population. It also overcounted the Non-Hispanic White population by 0.83 percent. Therefore, the *differential undercount* was about three percent. This *gross error* compounds the problem of inequality in the census, because wealthier, predominantly White communities receive more than their fair share of influence and resources, while poorer, non-White areas receive less than they should.

Improved methods and operations have improved census accuracy since the 1940 count. With the exception of the 1990 Census, which was the first to be measurably less accurate than the one before it, net undercount rates have generally declined. But differential undercounts, while also generally smaller, have persisted each decade, and duplication remains a serious challenge.

For 2020, the overarching goal for the Census Bureau and stakeholders alike is to eliminate the differential undercount. Funders can continue to play a meaningful role in achieving this outcome through robust, targeted grantmaking that allows "trusted voices" in vulnerable, underserved communities to promote the value of census participation and of civic engagement more broadly.

¹ In 2010, the program to measure census accuracy was called Census Coverage Measurement, or CCM; in 2000, it was the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.) program.

² Newer analyses reveal lower self-response rates for limited English proficient and single parent households, making it more likely that the census will miss these residents altogether.

EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ABOUT THE CENSUS

These guidelines for communicating effectively about the 2020 Census are grounded in a nationwide survey and focus groups of American voters conducted by Lake Research Partners.

How to talk about the Census:

- Keep the conversation at a high level and don't get too far into the policy weeds. People understand what the census is, we don't have to tell them.
- Describe the census as a **constitutional requirement**.
- Talk about “**community leaders**” rather than “policymakers” when describing who needs and uses data from the census and American Community Survey (ACS).

Emphasizing the importance and value of the data

- Census data are the basis for fair political representation.
- Local community leaders use census and ACS data to make decisions about allocating resources for community needs like education, assistance for veterans, hospitals, and transportation.
- Census and ACS data can identify emerging problems that community leaders need to deal with.

Key words to use in describing the Census:

- The census is “essential.” The count should be **accurate, valid, reliable, and fair**.
- The census is **required by the Constitution**. We have to do it and we should make sure it's done right.

Arguments to avoid in communications with general audiences (*However, some may be useful for communicating with policymakers and their staff.*)

- Messaging about cost-effectiveness: Discussing costs plays on opponents' turf.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ABOUT THE CENSUS

- Value of census data to businesses: Voters think businesses can and should buy their own data.
- Messages about distributing federal funding for “programs” or “services”: Talk instead about community needs.
- Language that sounds partisan or polarized.
- Uses of data for civil rights enforcement.
- Language about the census being unique: People believe a great deal of data exists from other sources.

Putting it together:

The census is required by the U.S. Constitution to ensure fair political representation. Community leaders rely on accurate census data to make good decisions about schools, seniors, veterans, and other community needs. It’s important that the Census Bureau get the 2020 Census right, and to get it right, it must be funded sufficiently.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund’s campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceedfund.org/>.

Last Updated: February 14, 2017

Counting for Dollars: Why It Matters

A fair and accurate 2020 Census is important for many reasons. The census is the basis for equal political representation under the Constitution. Policymakers use census data to identify community needs and to distribute federal program dollars to states and localities based on population numbers or other community characteristics that the census and related American Community Survey measure. Business and industry decide where to locate new plants and services based on census data, creating new jobs and promoting economic growth.

Sometimes, federal dollars are allotted to the states based on the number of people counted in the census; Medicaid is an example. In other cases, census numbers determine if a community is eligible for critical federal program dollars. Examples include city and county population thresholds (50,000 or 200,000) for Community Development Block Grants, and rural area designations for Rural Electrification loans. Still other programs allocate funds based on certain household characteristics, such as average or median income levels. Therefore, each person counted may directly determine funding levels for a few programs, and will influence funding levels for many others.

Unfortunately, certain groups—referred to as “hard-to-count”—are at higher risk of not being fully counted in the decennial census. Some of these groups have been historically underrepresented in the decennial census for decades; some may experience new or increased vulnerability due to major changes in methodology, such as relying on the internet as the primary way for households to respond to the 2020 Census; and some may be reluctant to respond due to current concerns about how their data may be used. Being left out of the census can deprive these groups and their communities of vital public and private resources.

While *we cannot say that each person counted in the census would increase federal program dollars to a state or locality by a certain amount*, census results are of utmost importance to distributing federal funding — and doing so equitably and prudently.

[Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds](#) is an analysis of the geographic distribution of funds from the 16 largest census-guided programs and is designed to help stakeholders and policymakers understand the extent to which federal financial assistance is distributed on the basis of census-derived data.

As this analysis makes clear, a more accurate census will: (1) ensure that every community, as well as people and households in need, receive the federal resources to which they are entitled under all census-guided programs; and (2) ensure that lawmakers can make more informed decisions about how to allocate federal dollars fairly, prudently, and effectively.

We hope this analysis is helpful in raising awareness of the value of a fair and accurate decennial census, and the dire consequences of failing to achieve that goal.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund’s campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

Last Updated: June 7, 2017

FACT SHEET: THE 2020 CENSUS | LOCAL UPDATE OF CENSUS ADDRESSES (LUCA) PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the *decennial census*?

A: The U.S. Constitutionⁱ requires a count of the nation's population — or *census* — every ten years for the purpose of apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states. Responsibility for taking the census lies with Congress, which in turn has delegated authority to conduct the count to the U.S. Department of Commerce and its Census Bureau.ⁱⁱ A series of Supreme Court cases subsequently established that congressional districts must have roughly equal numbers of people (Fourteenth Amendment's equal representation clause), so census numbers also are used for drawing district lines (the redistricting process). Therefore, the census also collects data on race and ethnicity, as well as gender, age, and (except for group living facilities) whether a dwelling is owned or rented, a loose proxy for higher or lower income households. An ongoing longer census form, called the American Community Survey (ACS), produces annually updated information for all communities between each census.

Q: Why is a fair and accurate census important?

A: Census data are a vital tool for overcoming the nation's legacy of slavery, racism, and discrimination. The collection of accurate, comprehensive race and ethnicity data in the census is central to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating many 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. The data provide evidence of disparate impact of governmental and private sector policies and practices, and assist civil and business leaders in devising solutions that promote equality of opportunity and address the needs of a diverse population.

Q: What is the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) Operation?

A: Congress created the LUCA program in 1994 to facilitate state and local participation in building the all-important address list for each census.ⁱⁱⁱ LUCA gives tribal, state, and local governments the opportunity to review and update the Census Bureau's address list and digital maps for their areas, reflecting their knowledge of non-traditional and low visibility housing in their communities. Through LUCA, communities can help ensure that the census counts the residents of all housing units and puts them in the right place.

The 2020 Census LUCA program will run from January 2017, when the Census Bureau sends an **Advance Notice** to all eligible governments with information and instructions about participating, to June 2020. Additional phases of LUCA include:

- **Invitation** — Formal invitation package, with registration and procedural information, sent to all eligible governments. *July — September 2017*
- **Address Review** — Participating governments have 120 days after receiving their materials to submit their address and spatial updates, which can include additions, deletions, and corrections. *February — May 2018*

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.

FACT SHEET: THE 2020 CENSUS | LOCAL UPDATE OF CENSUS ADDRESSES (LUCA) PROGRAM

- **Feedback and Closeout** — The Census Bureau will let participating governments know the results of the updates they submitted (*August — October 2019*) and finish the program with instructions on how to destroy or return confidential information reviewed during the program. *October 2019 — June 2020*

Q: Why is LUCA important for “hard-to-count” communities?

A: The Census Bureau strives to count all people living in the United State on Census Day,^{iv} but historically the census has missed people of color, urban and rural low-income households, and young children at disproportionately high rates. Immigrant, limited English proficient, and single parent households also are harder to count accurately.

The Master Address File (MAF) establishes the universe of living quarters (including group facilities, such as college dorms, prisons, and military barracks) for the census count. The accuracy of the MAF and related digital maps (the TIGER files^v, which put housing units in the correct location) is fundamental to an accurate census. The Census Bureau will not know that it has missed people who live in housing units that are not included on the MAF. In developing the address file and maps that guide census-taking, the Bureau can easily overlook commercial buildings that have been converted to residential units, people living in non-traditional housing (such as garages), illegally subdivided living quarters, and multiple households living in one structure. Local officials are better informed about their housing stock, especially in low-income neighborhoods and rural areas where difficult-to-spot or purposely “hidden” living quarters are more prevalent, and can help ensure the accuracy of the MAF and TIGER maps.

Q: How can civil rights advocates and other census stakeholders help ensure a successful 2020 Census LUCA Operation?

A: The LUCA program is voluntary, and only approximately 30 percent of eligible state, local, and tribal governments participated in 2010 Census LUCA activities.^{vi} Community organizations can encourage their civic leaders to accept the invitation to participate in the 2020 Census LUCA program and to allocate resources for thorough review and updating of address and map information for their area. Also, knowledgeable local leaders can help government entities identify hard-to-find, converted, and hidden housing units during the address review process, as long as they follow the strict confidentiality procedures governing the information the Census Bureau shares as part of the LUCA Operation.

ⁱ Article I, section 2, clause 3.

ⁱⁱ Title 13, United States Code (the Census Act).

ⁱⁱⁱ 13 U.S.C. §16, P.L. 103-430.

^{iv} April 1st of the year ending in “0.”

^v Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER) database.

^{vi} 2010 Census Local Update of Census Addresses Assessment, U.S. Census Bureau, (Aug. 13, 2012), available at https://www.census.gov/2010census/pdf/2010_Census_LUCA_Assessment.pdf.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund’s campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceeducationfund.org/>.



Penny wise, pound foolish: 20% Census needs funding now

BY WADE HENDERSON, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 03/06/17 01:20 PM EST

70 SHARES

SHARE (79)

TWEET

PL

Just In...

Rand Paul on refusing to use a handicap when golfing with Trump: 'I don't take any welfare'

BLOG BRIEFING ROOM
— 8M 48S AGO

Trump aide: '#DumbAsARockMika and lover #JealousJoe' are sad president won't return calls

MEDIA — 17M 15S AGO

NBC exec: 'Beneath my dignity' to respond to Trump attacks on Mika Brzezinski

MEDIA — 19M 46S AGO

Arkansas's 'social media cop' barred from posting on duty

BLOG BRIEFING ROOM
— 25M 54S AGO

Dem to lead PAC focused gaining control of Virginia House

CAMPAIGN — 27M 42S AGO

Trump taps Dem Senate aide for energy commission

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT
— 32M 8S AGO

New York Times staff to stage protest over job cuts

MEDIA — 37M 24S AGO

GOP adds \$45 billion in opioid money to



© Getty

With everything going on in Washington, you may have missed the recent news that the 2020 Census has been deemed a “high risk” federal program by the Government Accountability Office, which is concerned about the Census Bureau’s “ability to conduct a cost-effective enumeration” in 2020.

Should you be concerned? Yes, absolutely.

While 2020 seems far away, decisions being made this year by Congress and the Trump administration will determine whether the Census Bureau has the resources it needs to do the job well. And getting the census right is important to everyone.

- Fair, proportionate voting representation in our democracy depends on valid census data. That's why the census is required by the U.S. Constitution.
- Federal agencies rely on census data to monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more.
- Local leaders use census data to identify and address emerging needs for health care, education, housing, food and income security, rural access to broadband, and other services

[VIEW ALL](#)

Related News by



Former 'Daily Show' comedian slams CNN...



Ten Commandments monument destroyed...



OPINION: Memo to GOP — It's too late for...



Sanders on Wasserman Schultz challenger: 'I...

The census is required by the U.S. Constitution, and Congress is responsible for making sure the job gets done right. There aren't any do-overs.

The Census Bureau is currently operating at last year's funding levels, under a temporary measure that expires on April 27. But the agency needs a steady "ramp up" in funding to finish planning and start preparations for the 2020 Census. This isn't unfamiliar news to members of Congress; funding for the decennial census traditionally increases significantly as we get closer to the census year.

As a result of Congress' failure to allocate sufficient funds for the Census Bureau, there have been significant delays, cancellations, and cutbacks in census planning activities, including the testing of complex technological advancements. Just last year, the Bureau was forced to cancel three field tests for 2017 that would have allowed it to evaluate new, special methods for counting American Indian reservations and other sparsely populated and remote areas. A census operations test in Puerto Rico was also scrubbed.

The Census Bureau cannot afford to delay preparations any longer. The fate of equal representation for all communities rests on a fair and accurate count. Communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children are all at risk of being missed at disproportionately high rates.

As living situations across the country continue to become more complex, we must support the Census Bureau's efforts to conduct rigorous tests — not hamstringing an already challenging task with insufficient funding. So in addition to a funding increase, the Census Bureau must be exempt from the federal hiring freeze to start hiring workers soon for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, which serves as a "dress rehearsal" for the 2020 Census.

While a cost-effective census is a praiseworthy goal, saving money cannot come at the expense of an inclusive census that accurately reflects our population. Being undercounted deprives already vulnerable communities of fair representation and vital resources.

So Congress has two options: invest now in robust development of modern, cost-effective methods, or pay a lot more later for outdated operations that might not get the job done. Let's hope lawmakers make the right decision.

Wade Henderson is president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

The views of contributors are their own and not the views of The Hill.

[SHARE \(79\)](#)[TWEET](#)[PLUS ONE](#)

Sample Op-ed: Why You Should Care About The 2020 Census

Medicaid, State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), Head Start and Early Head Start, highway planning and construction, and our nation's foster care programs are among the top 16 largest federal programs whose funding – totaling nearly \$600 billion a year -- depend on census data. A fair and accurate census will ensure that *every* community receives the federal resources they are entitled to under all census-guided programs. Yet today, the 2020 Census faces unprecedented threats that should not be taken lightly because of the potential damaging implications for communities across the U.S.

While the census comes around once every 10 years, census data play a vital role in our lives every day. These data help advocates and lawmakers address disparities in housing, health care, employment, and education. Fair, proportionate voting representation in our democracy depends on valid census data, as does the enforcement of civil rights laws that protect voting rights. The health and wellbeing, as well as the political power of all communities, rests on a fair and accurate count.

This spring, Congress allocated an irresponsible and shortsighted budget for the Census Bureau that falls far below what the bureau needs to conduct an accurate census. We have already seen significant delays, cancellations, and cutbacks in census planning activities because the Bureau has been forced to shortchange operations. The Bureau has cancelled three field tests for 2017 that would have allowed it to evaluate new, special methods for counting American Indian reservations and other remote, sparsely populated areas.

Census data ensure that lawmakers can make more informed decisions about how to allocate federal dollars fairly and effectively. To put this into perspective, if the Census Bureau does not conduct a full and accurate count, education programs will not know how many children they must be prepared to serve, where school districts may need more teachers, or what communities need more schools. Urban planners need census data to know if a highway should be expanded or if more public transit is needed.

These functions all depend on a fair and accurate census. But communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children are all at risk of being missed at disproportionately high rates. Being hard-to-count can deprive these groups and their communities of equal political representation and vital public and private resources.

Members of Congress and the Trump administration have a responsibility to make sure the Census Bureau has what it needs to conduct the 2020 Census and to produce a fair and accurate count. Even though the Trump administration's unrealistic budget makes it clear that fair representation and access to a fair share of public and private resources is not a priority for them, it's up to us to make sure members of Congress know that this matters to us, their constituents – not in three years, but right now.

SAMPLE LTE #1

To the Editor:

The 2020 census is nearly three years away, but decisions are already being made in Congress about how it will be funded and executed. We should all be very concerned because this spring, the Trump administration proposed a reckless budget that shortchanges the Census Bureau at a time when it's in dire need of funding to conduct a fair and accurate count of the American people.

Congress must decide how much money to allocate to the bureau in the FY 18 budget, and failing to invest now could jeopardize census operations and undermine the ability of communities to receive both fair representation and equitable resources. The budget for the census plays a critical role in the distribution of federal funds that determines how much money will be allocated for the planning and implementation of federal programs and services, such as school construction, housing and community development, road and transportation planning, and infant healthcare.

If the 2020 Census is not done right, the federal assistance programs [STATE] offers our communities—Medicaid, highway planning and construction, special education grants, children's health insurance plans, child care and foster care—could face serious cuts that would hurt already vulnerable communities. Without accurate census data, social service organizations and government officials cannot determine the disparities in our state's education system, transportation services, economic conditions and development of specific areas.

A fair and accurate census that reflects our communities is absolutely vital. Getting the count wrong would be detrimental to the needs of our diverse communities in [STATE]. We must insist that our members of Congress step up and make sure the census has what it needs to do the job right.

Advocate Jane Doe

SAMPLE LTE #2

To the Editor:

The decennial census, which is required by the Constitution, is less than three years away, and it's already in trouble. Inadequate funding is threatening a fair and accurate count that's important for our democracy and the fair distribution of public funds, including to [STATE residents]. Right now, Congress should be providing more funding to the census as it ramps up for the herculean task of counting every single person in our country, but President Trump has proposed an unrealistic and shortsighted funding level for the Census Bureau, and congressional leaders don't appear to be making the census the priority it should be.

Why does this matter? It's simple: equal representation of all communities is at stake. The data gathered by the census is vital to identify our communities' needs and allows policymakers to make more informed decisions of what our infrastructure, our children, our elderly, and our local business owners need. We need our members of Congress to provide adequate funding so that the census accurately reflects our communities. We have this one opportunity to get it right. There are no do-overs.

Congress and the Trump administration must do their jobs to make sure the census is done right. Too much is at stake to get it wrong.

Advocate Jane Doe