Why a Fair and Accurate Census Matters to Thriving Private and Public Sectors

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Why a Fair and Accurate Census Matters to Thriving Private and Public Sectors

Why is the census important?
The U.S. Constitution requires an accurate count of the nation’s population every 10 years through a nationwide census. In addition, the Census Bureau collects more detailed socio-economic data on U.S. households each year through the American Community Survey (ACS), which is a legal part of the decennial census. Together, the census and the ACS produce some of the nation’s best data for understanding the characteristics of the population and the needs of people living in the United States.

The 2020 Census and the ACS are currently facing fiscal, operational, and policy threats that could jeopardize a fair and accurate count, which would weaken data used by the health care, education, housing, local government, transportation, and manufacturing sectors and could reduce federal funding of critical programs. Stakeholders should engage now in efforts to protect these crucial data collection activities.

Accurate information is needed across sectors to make strategic decisions regarding the services, programs, and products that are provided, funded, and utilized. An inaccurate measure of the U.S. population and its characteristics could deprive key public and private sectors of vital resources needed to ensure they are meeting each community’s needs.

Why is the census an urgent issue right now?
Counting every person in the United States is a massive and complex undertaking even under the best conditions. Ensuring a fair, inclusive, and accurate count requires careful planning, continual updating of address information, advance testing of procedures and technology, and the hiring, training, and oversight of a large temporary workforce to gather and process the data. Some groups of people have historically proven to be challenging to count accurately. The census misses disproportionate numbers of people of color, urban and rural low-income households, and young children. The Census Bureau classifies these communities, as well as immigrant, limited English proficient, and single-parent headed households, as “hard-to-count.” Accurately enumerating these communities takes a focused effort.

There are additional challenges facing the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau is working against the clock and is already behind schedule. Congress must make sure that the bureau has adequate funding now to bolster outreach and promotion activities, boost the number of partnership specialists hired, and have the proper footprint in the field. Cyber-security threats; fear of government authorities, which permeates some communities in every state and region; disengagement from civic life in communities hit by drug epidemics – these are just some of the external factors working against a successful 2020 Census. Still other problems could have been avoided: lack of a Senate-confirmed Census Director and other permanent top staff at the Census Bureau; delayed and generally insufficient annual funding throughout the research, testing, and planning phases; and an 11th hour proposal to add an unnecessary and untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census form.

Decisions made now by Congress and federal agencies – including the Commerce Department, the Census Bureau, and the Office of Management and Budget – will determine whether planning, operations, and funding are sufficient to do the job right.

How does a fair and accurate census benefit your sector?
HEALTH CARE

Impact on Health and Health Care Data:
The decennial census and ACS produce health and
healthcare data and inform surveys that are important to the health sector. Examples include:

- **Detailed Population Demographics:** The ACS is the most detailed federal survey with local data on many racial/ethnic groups, some of which have little representation in other data reporting; these data help ensure more equitable access to health care.³

- **Social Determinants of Health:** The ACS and census-derived Current Population Survey (CPS) both track factors that impact health, such as income, housing, and national origins.⁴ The factors’ influence on health can be tracked by linking them with the Census Bureau’s uniquely rich and compatible data.

- **Insurance:** The ACS generates key data programs like the Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, which gives local coverage estimates.⁵ The CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) includes health insurance data and depends on the census.⁶ These data have been crucial in measuring uninsured rates and Medicaid and Medicare coverage.

- **Public Health:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) data collection methodology for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is based on the decennial census and is redesigned after each decennial.⁷ The CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and researchers in many fields use the NHIS to track issues ranging from disease to barriers to care to federal programs’ success.

- **Hospitals:** HHS’s Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project utilizes decennial and ACS data in its longitudinal hospital database, which is used to study service delivery and patient well-being at the national, state, and local levels.⁸

- **Fertility:** The ACS and CPS’ June Fertility Supplement provide fertility data.⁹ The Supplement examines population growth and informs policies concerning family demographics.¹⁰

- **Disability:** The ACS and CPS ASEC record disability types and related work outcomes.¹¹

**Impact on Funding for Federal Health Programs:**

Census and ACS data also help determine hundreds of billions of dollars¹² in federal funding for health care programs each year. Examples of the largest programs supported by these data include:

- **Medicaid:** The formula that calculates Medicaid reimbursement levels includes the average income per person in each state from the Bureau of Economic Analysis’ census-derived estimate of each state’s per-capita income.

- **Medicare Part B:** Medicare uses the Geographic Practice Cost Indices, which are based on ACS data, to determine reimbursement rates based on how much it costs to practice in a certain area.

- **State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):** SCHIP uses the HHS poverty guidelines and the CPS ASEC to determine eligibility and allocation of funds.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** WIC uses the HHS poverty guidelines for eligibility, the census-derived Consumer Price Index to set monthly food vouchers’ prices, and the ACS to decide how much funding each state receives.

- **Health Centers Program:** This program depends on the census-derived Index of Medical Underservice from the HHS to determine which groups in which areas are underserved.

- **Reproductive Health Programs:** Title X Family Planning Grants, Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grants, the 340B Drug Pricing Program, and Social Services Block Grants (SSBG) all use census-derived population counts in order to allocate their funds.¹³

**Impact on Geography and Community-Based Services:**

The ACS, the only source of reliable, comparable community-level data, helps leaders locate health facilities and Health Professional Shortage Areas, plan for essential services, and hire medical professionals.¹⁴ Census data assist in the delivery and research of geographically driven health systems. For example, the federal Rural Health Program utilizes census data to define “non-urbanized areas” to serve Medicare patients.¹⁵

Regionally, this classification is used to collect data in urban and rural areas, which is important, as those in rural areas may be more likely to use public insurance.¹⁶

**EDUCATION**

**Impact on Education-Related Data:**

The decennial census, the ACS, and other decennial census-derived sources provide education-related data that inform education surveys and research, which education providers and scholars use to measure and predict trends and needs across the country. The ACS contains particularly rich education data, such as statistics on school enrollment broken down by different demographics.¹⁷ Education-related data from the census and the ACS inform a variety of research and program-
Local Educational Needs: The ACS is the only source of reliable, comparable community-level data for the analysis of neighborhood needs. As such, data from the ACS help community leaders plan for school construction and evaluate current educational programs. For example, ACS data on demographics, income, and education has been used to identify neighborhoods in Cincinnati that needed interventions in their educational systems.

School District Characteristics: The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Studies (NCES) uses ACS data in its Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) to compare school districts across the country on benchmarks such as educational attainment and school enrollment based on race. EDGE also uses census data to develop annual estimates of children in poverty by school district to help the department determine the annual allocation of Title I funding to states and school districts.

Preschool and Early Education: The ACS numbers on preschool and kindergarten enrollment are used by organizations for a variety of projects, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s annual KIDS COUNT project. Generations United’s report on the benefits of preschool policies in different states, Education Week’s annual Quality Counts reports on state-level education policies, and the Center for Public Education’s work on pre-K.

High School Graduation and Dropout Rates: The NCES also uses decennial census-derived Current Population Survey (CPS) data on high school completion rates and both CPS and ACS data on high school dropout rates and on those who earn educational certifications, certificates, and licenses.

Higher Education Performance: Data from the ACS also help identify needs in the field of higher education. For example, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education developed a report in 2016 on higher education performance using ACS data on race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age, and employment rates in Minnesota.

Labor Force Trends: The ACS and CPS both provide data on educational attainment that are used to examine local labor force trends, such as unemployment rates.

Science and Engineering Workforce: The National Science Foundation specifically uses the ACS undergraduate field of degree question to look at the state of the national science and engineering workforce.

Immigrant Students: Data from the ACS also help illuminate how the education system is serving immigrant students. For example, New York City uses ACS data on foreign-born populations to project the school enrollment of immigrant schoolchildren.

Bilingual Programming: The Bilingual Education Act grants funds to local school districts to provide bilingual language programs based on ACS and decennial census data on race/ethnicity.

Education-Related Expenditures: The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which uses decennial census-derived data and the ACS, has a Regional Price Parities Index, which examines different expenditures by sector, such as price levels of education services in different regions around the country. Impact on Funding for Federal Education Programs: Decennial census and ACS data help determine how the federal government allocates more than $47 billion in federal funding for educational programs each year. These programs provide critical resources to marginalized communities and include:

Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies: This program uses decennial census-derived Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) to get an accurate count of the children in the United States and their poverty rates in order to allocate funding to help them meet State academic standards.

Carl T. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act Programs: These programs use census population estimates to allocate funding for career and technical education grant programs.

Adult Education-Basic Grants to States Program: States use ACS data on educational attainment in order to fund local programs for adult education and literacy.

National School Lunch Program: The program uses decennial census-derived poverty guidelines from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to determine eligibility and the census-derived Consumer Price Index (CPI) to set its federal reimbursement rate.

Special Education Grants (IDEA) Program:
This program uses the decennial census’ population counts, along with the CPS and the SAIPE, to provide accurate grants to states and LEAs.\textsuperscript{41}

- **Head Start and Early Start Programs:** Both of these programs use the decennial census-derived HHS poverty guidelines to determine program eligibility, the CPI to make inflation adjustments, and the ACS for program expansion funds.\textsuperscript{42}

- **Indian Education Grants to Local Agencies:** These grant programs also use decennial census-derived data to determine grant eligibility.\textsuperscript{43}

**Impact on the Enforcement of Civil Rights Laws:**

ACS data are also used to enforce federal anti-discrimination laws related to education. For example, ACS data on race and ethnicity, English language ability, and educational attainment are used by the Department of Justice to enforce Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, which ensures that those with Limited English Proficiency have language assistance provided to them in their first language throughout the election process.\textsuperscript{44} In addition, the Department of Justice also uses ACS data on gender, ancestry, and English language ability to make sure that schools are compliant with anti-discrimination laws.\textsuperscript{45}

**HOUSING**

**Impact on Housing-Related Data:**

The decennial census and ACS produce data that are crucial to the non-institutional, residential housing sector, which makes up about 16 percent of the national GDP.\textsuperscript{46} The ACS provides data on a housing unit’s building-type, cost, utilities, and occupants.\textsuperscript{47} The census provides data that are used to determine Fair Market Rents (FMR), which are used for a number of housing programs. Surveys that show current housing trends and help predict future trends depend on the census and ACS as well, including:

- **American Housing Survey (AHS):** The AHS measures housing supply, demand, conditions, and costs nationwide and uses decennial census data to determine which households will be included in the survey.\textsuperscript{48}

- **National Housing Survey:** Fannie Mae’s survey uses the ACS to accurately represent all United States households’ makeup and location.\textsuperscript{49} The survey helps create the Home Purchase Sentiment Index, which documents consumers’ sentiments about the housing market and projects future trends.

- **Housing Vacancies:** The Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Survey (HVS) – a supplement to the census-derived Current Population Survey (CPS)\textsuperscript{50} – uses decennial census data to establish which households will be included in the HVS and to determine the need for new federal housing programs.\textsuperscript{51} Regionally, the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey uses the decennial census to make sure the survey represents all city households and uses decennial and ACS demographic and housing data to examine the city’s housing market.\textsuperscript{52}

The private sector also depends on decennial census and ACS data in order to provide consumers and businesses with the most up-to-date information on the housing market, including:

- **Prices:** Zillow.com uses ACS data to value homes and create an affordability index, which can be used to determine a home or rental unit’s cost.\textsuperscript{53} The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller Home Price Indices use both census and ACS housing stock data to measure changes in metro housing prices.\textsuperscript{54}

- **Housing Type:** Ribbon Demographics uses ACS data to approximate demand for any new or renovated housing units and then matches those residents with the best types of units for them.\textsuperscript{55}

- **Real Estate Industry:** The Census Business Builder allows those who work in the housing industry, such as real estate agents and developers, to view their own data alongside ACS data. The ACS data are tailored to their industry, location, and size to give them localized information.\textsuperscript{56} The National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts also uses many decennial census-derived data sources such as the ACS, AHS, and CPS to examine housing trends, such as the shift from home ownership to renting in the last decade.\textsuperscript{57}

**Impact on Funding for Federal Housing Programs:**

Decennial census and ACS data also help determine more than $30 billion\textsuperscript{58} in annual federal funding for major housing programs, including:

- **Low Income Renters:** Section 8 Housing Vouchers, which provide rental assistance to families; Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments, which provide assistance to low-income families through subsidies to property owners; and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) depend on the ACS and the census to assess a locality’s housing needs and appropriate rent levels.\textsuperscript{59}
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): LIHEAP uses ACS data to award homeowners and renters the correct amount of assistance to pay their energy bills.\(^6^0\)

Other HUD Programs: The Housing Trust Fund and programs that make sure housing units are compliant with disability and environmental regulations depend on the ACS for a count of substandard housing units, data on the prevalence of other housing problems within an area, and data on the median income of an area.\(^6^1\)

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Impact on Local Data:**

The census, the ACS, and other census-derived datasets provide a framework for research on issues that are important to local governments, allowing them to provide services to their residents. Examples include:

- **Cities:** A 2017 Sunlight Foundation survey of city staff across the United States found that more than 80 percent of officials use demographic data, specifically from the census and the ACS, to inform decisions on issues such as local infrastructure, public health, and food security.\(^6^2\)

- **Counties:** County governments throughout the country use data from the census and ACS for a wide range of purposes. For example, in Santa Clara County, California, the Public Health Department evaluated the county’s LGBTQ population wellbeing using ACS data, and in Lexington-Fayette Urban County, Kentucky, the Human Rights Commission analyzed and published a report on local housing trends using ACS demographic, economic, and housing data.\(^6^3\)

- **Local Economic Indicators:** The Census Bureau’s County Business Patterns, which gives an economic overview of small areas across the United States by industry, is also derived from the census.\(^6^4\) The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Local Area Unemployment Statistics has monthly and annual employment statistics for localities, which are defined based on the decennial census.\(^6^5\)

**Impact on Funding for Local Programs:**

Census and ACS data help determine hundreds of billions of dollars in annual federal funding\(^6^6\) that local government agencies use to serve their communities. Examples of the largest programs supported by these data include:

- **Housing**
  - **Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers/Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments:** Both programs depend on the census and ACS data to determine local housing needs and funding levels for Public Housing Agencies (PHA) that help low-income renters afford housing.\(^6^7\)
  - **Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grants:** These grants help local governments and PHAs redevelop public and assisted housing using decennial census-derived data.\(^6^8\)

- **Education**
  - **Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies:** This program uses the census-derived Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) to estimate how many school-age children are in poverty and allocate funds to low-income schools and school districts.\(^6^9\)
  - **Head Start:** Head Start and Early Head Start, which provide early care and education for low-income children, are often administered by local agencies, and use the census-derived U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) poverty guidelines to determine program eligibility, the census-derived Consumer Price Index (CPI) to make inflation adjustments, and the ACS for program expansion funds.\(^7^0\)
  - **Special Education Grants:** Grants are awarded to local education agencies using census population estimates, the ACS, SAIPE, and the census-benchmarked Current Population Survey.\(^7^1\)

- **Health Programs**
  - **Health Centers Program:** This program helps communities open health clinics and uses the Index of Medical Underservice, which is based on the census, to determine who is underserved.\(^7^2\)
  - **Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Using the HHS poverty guidelines and the CPI to make inflation adjustments, WIC helps local agencies provide nutritious food, nutrition education, and service referrals to women and young children.\(^7^3\)

- **Miscellaneous**
  - **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG):** CSBG funds are granted to local agencies to address poverty in their communities; census-derived HHS poverty guidelines determine eligibility.\(^7^4\)
  - **Community Development Block Grant**
(CDBG): CDBG funds are given to communities based on their income level, which is determined using the ACS. More than 7,250 local governments are eligible for grants which can be used to increase access to affordable housing and economic opportunities for their residents.

Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program: This program helps local agencies fund development projects for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) designated “rural areas,” which are determined based on decennial census data.

**MANUFACTURING**

*Impact on Manufacturing-Related Data:*
The ACS contains rich manufacturing data, including the number of workers in a particular industry, their positions, education, and median earnings. The census and sources derived from it inform other premier surveys used to measure trends and needs in the manufacturing sector, including:

- **Price Indices:** The Consumer Price Index (CPI) uses Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs), which are based on the census, to choose the households whose data are used to calculate the index and to measure inflation rates.

- **Labor Force:** The Current Population Survey (CPS), a census-derived dataset, includes statistics about the labor force by industry, including manufacturing.

- **Construction:** The Survey of Construction uses CPS and census results to provide housing sale and construction data, which manufacturers use to plan production and estimate market shares.

- **Exports:** The Census Bureau’s “Exports from Manufacturing” uses census-derived Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) numbers to value exports and estimate job creation. The International Trade Administration’s Exports from United States Metropolitan Areas use CBSAs to record urban areas’ exports.

- **Business Characteristics:** The Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs uses MSAs to provide characteristics of businesses and entrepreneurs. The Census Bureau’s County Business Patterns gives an economic overview of small areas nationwide. Its OnTheMap application shows where people work by demographic groups and industries, both use decennial census-derived sources.

*Impact on Funding for Federal Manufacturing Programs:*
Census and ACS data also help determine more than $11 billion in annual federal funding for manufacturing programs, such as:

- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG):** CDBG funds are awarded based on ACS income data. States use CDBGs for projects such as North Carolina’s Building Reuse Program, which renovates vacant buildings and identifies manufacturing projects as high priority.

- **Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program:** This U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program gives loans to rural businesses, including manufacturers, using decennial-census-derived urbanized areas to determine eligibility.

- **Small Business Development Center Program:** This U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) program provides services such as manufacturing assistance to business owners, using tools such as the ACS.

- **New Market Tax Credit (NMTC):** The NMTC uses census tracts, geographic units developed during preparations for each census, to determine eligibility. It helps small and medium-sized businesses with financing in new markets, like renewable energy generation.

**TRANSPORTATION**

*Impact on Transportation-Related Data:*
The ACS produces rich transportation-related data, such as data on means of transportation, carpooling, commute time, and number of vehicles per household. Such data are crucial to the transportation sector, which makes up almost a tenth of the national GDP. In particular, census and ACS data help measure and predict transportation market trends and needs regarding:

- **Planning:** The Census Transportation Planning Products Program (CTPP) run by the Department of Transportation (DOT) uses ACS data on demographics, home and work locations, and commuters to produce environmental impact reports, emergency operations management reports, and “corridor studies” evaluating how to improve transportation in a certain travel
corridor based on funding and the surrounding community.96

- **Commuting:** The Census Bureau’s OntheMap tool shows the connection between where residents work and live with block-level decennial data.99 It is used in transportation planning and to compare and locate worksites in different areas.

- **Geographic Trends:** The federal Location Affordability Portal uses Core-Based Statistical Areas, which are based on the decennial census, to help estimate an area’s housing and transportation costs.100 To take one example, Vermont’s Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission uses ACS data on housing affordability to plan county transportation services.101

- **Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** ACS data on where workers with disabilities live and the range of their mobility allow transit operators to ensure ADA compliance.102

**Impact on Funding for Federal Transportation Programs:**

Decennial census and ACS data also help allocate more than $44 billion103 in federal funding each year to states and cities for transportation infrastructure projects, including:

- **Highway Planning and Construction Program:** This program depends on decennial census and ACS data to preserve the National Highway System across the country.104

- **Urbanized Area Formula Funding and Formula Grants for Rural Areas:** The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) gives grants to urbanized and rural areas, which are designated using decennial census data.105

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** CDBG funds are given to communities based on their income level, which is determined using the ACS,106 and are used for infrastructure projects that include making improvements to roads and other transit-ways.107

- **Federal Transit Capital Investment Grants:** The FTA awards grants for new public transportation projects by assessing transit patterns, development density, and pedestrian-friendliness using information from the CTPP and 2010 Census blocks.108

- **State and Community Highway Safety Grants:** This program uses state population counts from the latest decennial census to determine grant amounts for highway safety programs.109

- **Federal Transit Metropolitan Planning Grant Program:** These grants fund transportation planning in urbanized areas, which are defined using census data.110

**How can you help ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census?**

Preparations for the 2020 Census are underway. Now is the time to engage in activities that can help improve the fairness and accuracy of the 2020 Census. Here are some ideas:

- Help your members of Congress understand why it’s important to support adequate resources for the Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census in a way that will accurately collect data used by the health care, education, housing, local government, transportation, and manufacturing sectors. The Census Bureau needs a major annual funding ramp up several years before a decennial census to perform critical tests and build out a massive infrastructure. Already – due to funding constraints – important activities needed for a fair and accurate 2020 Census have been postponed or canceled. Without a sufficient increase in the Census Bureau’s budget, a complete count will be in jeopardy, and census costs could increase by billions of dollars when the count starts.

- Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments. The Census Project (https://thecensusproject.org/) provides regular updates on census-related activities in Congress and the administration. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights also publishes many helpful resources at https://civilrights.org/census/.

- Form or join a Census Complete Count Committee to raise awareness about the 2020 Census. As the 2020 Census approaches, state and local officials can form, and advocates can join, Complete Count Committees that will be established in many states and localities to help ensure a complete census.111 It is important that Complete Count Committees include voices for the health care, education, housing, transportation, and manufacturing sectors to remind leaders and local census staff of the issues specific to these fields.

- Join the National Business Network for an Accurate Census administered by Ready-Nation, a national, nonpartisan business organization. The virtual network will provide...
periodic updates about the census by email and opportunities to participate in activities that are a light-lift in support of an accurate 2020 Census. These will include Get Out the Count activities to encourage residents to complete their census forms. Contact Jeff Connor-Naylor at jnaylor@readynation.org to learn more or join this free, private listserv.

- **Looking ahead, become a Census Bureau partner and help ensure that the Census Bureau’s partnership program gets the resources it needs.** Budget shortfalls are also putting the effectiveness of this important outreach program at risk. Partners (community organizations, businesses, faith and educational institutions, and the like) get timely updates from the Census Bureau as well as educational and promotional material (https://www.census.gov/partners/).

*If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Sonum Nerurkar, Get Out the Count Manager, at Nerurkar@civilrights.org.*
Endnotes


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