Roadmap to
the 2030 Census
A Resource for Community-Based
Organizations and Advocacy Groups

April 2022
Our democracy depends on our collective engagement and our commitment to ensuring a fair and accurate decennial census year in and year out. During the 2020 Census, the Census Counts campaign, housed at The Leadership Conference Education Fund and co-chaired at the time by NALEO Educational Fund and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, brought together community-based organizations across a wide spectrum of advocacy and outreach efforts to ensure communities that have been historically missed were counted in the 2020 Census.

Amid the challenges of the 2020 Census, we created a movement, and with the lessons from 2020 fresh in our minds, we know what is needed to ensure a successful 2030 Census. By investing our time now, we can lay a strong foundation for those who will work to get our communities counted in 2030. Our communities can’t wait.

For these reasons, inspired by the Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation’s "A Blueprint for Philanthropic Census Engagement," The Education Fund and Census Counts developed the “Roadmap to the 2030 Census.” This resource includes U.S. Census Bureau milestones and concrete examples of ways community-based and advocacy organizations, state and local governments, and other partners can engage in census work throughout the decade.

Underlying all the steps below is the policy and advocacy work that needs to be done all decade long to ensure adequate funding for the Census Bureau, advocacy for updated questionnaires (including revised race/ethnicity questions and sexual orientation and gender identity, or SOGI, questions), and input on operational changes and any legislative recommendations resulting from the experiences and aftermath of the 2020 Census.

Please note that the timeline below is based on the rollout of activities by the Census Bureau for the 2020 Census and may change depending on funding, lessons learned, or changes in operations. This document will be updated annually to capture changing information and needs.
2021 – 2022

2021 Census Milestones

➜ Release of 2020 Census congressional apportionment counts and results; resident population totals for the nation, 50 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (April 26).

➜ Release of 2020 Census redistricting “legacy format” data files (August 12) and transmittal of user-friendly redistricting files to the states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (September 16).

• Redistricting data files contain block level data by race and Hispanic origin, voting age (18+), plus housing unit counts and occupancy status, and Group Quarters data by type of facility (e.g., prisons, college dorms, military barracks, and more).

➜ Release of demographic profiles for governmental units (places) on a flow basis by state.

➜ 2020 Census assessments and evaluations begin (through 2023, tentatively).

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing).

➜ Count Question Resolution program begins December 1 (deadline for submissions is June 30, 2023).

2022 Census Milestones

➜ Post Census Group Quarters Review launch.

➜ Results from the Post-Enumeration Survey.

➜ 1950 Census forms become available at the National Archives (April 1).

➜ Release of detailed data sets for various levels of geography, with cross-tabulations by race/ethnicity, age, and other characteristics (Demographic and Housing Characteristics File and Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File or DHC and D-DHC).

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing).

➜ Research and testing to inform 2030 Census design and operational development begins.

➜ 2022 Economic Census.
**Actions for Community-Based Organizations**

➜ Document and preserve the work your organization did for the 2020 Census and be sure to note the members of your census coalition and broader network (such as trusted messengers).

➜ Collect outreach and data success stories to use in 2030 GOTC work.

➜ Evaluate accomplishments, best practices, challenges, and solutions from your 2020 Census campaign.

➜ Contribute to efforts to amplify 2020 Census learnings and develop recommendations for the Census Bureau.

➜ Develop a plan for engaging your census coalition throughout the decade, with a specific focus on how your organization can sustain civil infrastructure leading up to the 2030 Census.

- Additionally, maintain relationships with funders and funder/PSO collaboratives, as well as government, service providers, and practitioner partners throughout the decade. These collaborations can mobilize around issues like improving accessibility and equity around census data and other Census Bureau data and tools; expanding access to broadband infrastructure; leveraging technology and local knowledge to map communities; building government knowledge and improving data collection on the LGBTQ+ community and people experiencing homelessness; and strengthening civic participation.

➜ Stay updated on the 2020 Census data release timeline, 2020 Census data quality assessments (e.g., Census Bureau data and independent benchmarks), related mitigation strategies, and census policy issues and litigation.

➜ Educate communities on direct impacts of the 2020 Census through storytelling campaigns reiterating the importance of the decennial census and promote positive narratives around data releases.

➜ Connect decennial censuses to other issues such as data equity, redistricting, American Community Survey (ACS), and health care.
• Educate communities and elected officials on the importance of the ACS and encourage community participation. Additionally, contribute to efforts to support adequate funding for the Census Bureau through the annual appropriations process.

• Educate communities and elected officials on the pulse surveys, particularly the household pulse surveys, which provide real-time information regarding the needs of communities.

• Educate communities and businesses about the 2022 Economic Census.

• Optional: Begin to build awareness and educate partners on how to use census data for advocacy efforts (such as voting, education equity, transportation, health care, or housing issues) or for economic business and economic issues. Consider which other groups to bring into the census coalition.
2023 – 2025

Census Milestones

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing).

➜ 2022 Economic Census.

➜ Household Pulse Surveys (ongoing).

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

➜ Leverage 2020 Census (and ACS) data for work on voting rights, other civil and human rights issues, and social and economic justice campaigns. Through this work, continue to educate coalition partners and communities about the importance of these surveys.

➜ Begin to engage with local and regional funders on 2030 Census design/planning and how they can help support organizations on the ground with outreach efforts.

➜ Monitor and, as appropriate, contribute to research and development decisions for the 2030 Census, such as residence criteria, operations (e.g., reliance on the internet, mapping technologies, and administrative records), questionnaire development (e.g., improvement of race/ethnicity questions and consideration of a gender identity question).

➜ Start educating local and state entities about the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA).

  ● Offer at least one broad briefing or webinar for local and state entities on the importance of LUCA.

  ● Work with states and local entities to help them plan and have the infrastructure to support LUCA.

➜ Educate local governments and other partners about the importance of Census Bureau economic surveys in providing a full picture of our communities.

➜ Continue to support annual appropriations for the Census Bureau, educate communities about the ACS, and maintain relationships with census coalition partners.

➜ Continue on-the-ground messaging around the importance of the census with census stories, particularly related to any positive (or negative) developments in the community. Connect programs to federal funding and Census Bureau products.

➜ Optional: Continue to broaden census coalition with partners on the ground.
2026

Census Milestones

► Testing for the 2030 Census to support key decisions affecting 2030 Census design and operations. Those decisions include, but are not limited to, questionnaire content (topics) and question wording and possible revisions to the Residence Criteria and Situations (informally known as “residence rules”).

► American Community Survey (ongoing).

► Demographic and economic surveys (ongoing).

► Potential launch of 2030 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators (CBAMS).

► Potential launch of Census Bureau communications program.

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

► Identify at least one staff person dedicated to census issues part time.

- This person should begin to look at documents from the 2020 Census and the CBAMS for the 2030 Census (if data have been released) and use those materials to build an initial GOTC (and advocacy, if relevant) plan for 2030.

► If CBAMS has been launched, help the Census Bureau seat focus groups.

► Depending on your state’s legislative session, begin advocacy efforts and conversations with state governments early to build census outreach funding for CBOs into their fiscal year 2028, 2029, and 2030 budgets (covering those calendar years).

► Begin to gauge interest in 2030 Census involvement within your network and build out a strategy to bring in key partners for census engagement such as funders, elected officials, community-based organizations, advocacy organizations, demographers, businesses, and others.

Have 2020 Census success stories at the ready.
Start to identify potential partners to engage with the Census Bureau and census champions.

- Develop the structure of the coalition.
- Be prepared to tell prospective coalition members what you expect them to do, or the role you think they can play, in promoting census participation in your communities.

Have 2020 Census success stories at the ready.

Identify specific communities (e.g., regions, cities, neighborhoods, rural communities, tribal areas) and specific population groups (such as communities of color, people with disabilities, and college students) at greatest risk of undercounting to inform 2030 Census campaign strategy and funding decisions, if applicable.

Begin to map out state philanthropy organizations that are providing aligned and/or joint funding for state-specific community-based organizations.

Offer at least two broad briefings/webinars for funders, cosponsored by interested affinity groups, to get buy-in for engagement in 2030 Census preparations. Focus on 2030 Census methodology, operations, timeline for implementation, and organizing strategy.

Toward the end of 2026, set up conversations with local and state entities that will participate in the LUCA operation. Offer to be of assistance, within the program’s legal parameters, to ensure accuracy in the residential address list for their jurisdictions.

- Offer at least one broad briefing or webinar for local and state entities on the importance of LUCA.

Continue to monitor and contribute to research and development decisions for the 2030 Census, educate communities on the importance of the ACS, and support efforts to adequately fund the Census Bureau.

Optional: By mid-2026 or 2027, begin the initial round of message testing for the 2030 Census. Note that many state-based organizations conducted their own message testing for the 2020 Census. However, should your organization not have the funds to conduct unique message testing, be aware that many large national organizations will most likely conduct message testing around this time. The results of this messaging research are typically shared among broader census networks.
2027

Census Milestones

➜ Potential final testing of specific census operations, methods, and questions.

➜ Submission of topics to be covered in the 2030 Census and ACS to Congress by April 1, 2027.

➜ Start of the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) operation (tentative).

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing).

➜ 2027 Economic Census.

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

➜ Toward the beginning of 2027, launch your 2030 Census coalition.

• Identify co-chairs.

• Identify the scope of work.

• Invite your network to join and develop a strategy to target specific audiences.

• Develop communication and meeting structure (i.e., how often will you meet? How will you communicate?).

• Begin regular census coalition meetings (quarterly or every other month is recommended at this time) to keep 2030 Census coalition members informed about key 2030 Census policy and operational developments.

• Identify shared resource needs (e.g., “hard to count” maps, analyses of geographic funding based on census/ACS data, toolkits, effective messaging strategies) and gaps.
Ramp up funding efforts for state government budgets and determine gaps and other funding opportunities. This includes national, regional, and local foundations/philanthropy organizations. Start this process early, as pulling philanthropy organizations together may take some time for coordinated, collaborative efforts.

Develop a timeline for 2030 Census engagement and outreach campaigns.

Begin to identify media partners, with an emphasis on local and ethnic media, who can partner with you on a 2030 Census campaign and begin to curate a list of language translation needs to prepare for GOTC.

Continue to support LUCA operations, identify specific communities at greatest risk of undercounting, identify census partners, monitor and contribute to research and development decisions for the 2030 Census, educate communities on the importance of the ACS, and support efforts to adequately fund the Census Bureau.

By the end of 2027, granting should become available to move full steam ahead. Identify one full-time staff member to work on census issues.

Educate communities and businesses about the 2022 Economic Census.

Track if any census tests will be taking place in your area in order to help with GOTC for the test.

Optional: By mid-2026 or 2027, begin the initial round of message testing for the 2030 Census. Note that many state-based organizations conducted their own message testing for the 2020 Census. However, should your organization not have the funds to conduct unique message testing, be aware that many large national organizations will most likely conduct message testing around this time. The results of this messaging research are typically shared among broader census networks.
2028

Census Milestones

➜ End-To-End Census Test (sometimes called a “dress rehearsal”).

➜ Submission of 2030 Census and ACS questions to Congress by April 1, 2028.

➜ Six regional census offices/centers open.

➜ Potential launch of in-field address canvassing and opening of local census offices.

➜ Recruitment begins for temporary census positions, including partnership specialists, local office managers/staff, address listers, and peak operations field staff.

➜ Potential launch of education and communications campaigns.

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing).

➜ 2027 Economic Census.

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

➜ Identify national and state coalitions that may be conducting 2030 Census outreach efforts. If applicable, join these national and state coalitions for support and resources; share this information with your local-level coalition members.

➜ Build relationships with your regional census office/regional census center officials.

➜ Build relationships with your local and/or state Complete Count Committee(s) (CCC) to ensure effective investment strategies and constructive relationships between your census coalition and state/municipal/local officials.

● CCCs will begin to form in 2028 and will continue to form through spring 2029.

● No CCCs in your community? Host community census briefings and connect with local leaders to create your own.
→ Deepen and clarify roles in census coalitions. Coordinate to avoid duplication of work.

- Suggestion: Build working groups that can cover messaging, communications, field outreach, and digital outreach/tools and materials.

→ Determine who is obtaining digital and relational organizing tools and start obtaining lists and training partners and volunteers on using them.

→ Continue to identify specific communities at greatest risk of undercounting, identify census partners, monitor decisions for the 2030 Census, educate communities on the importance of the ACS, and support efforts to adequately fund the Census Bureau.

→ By the end of 2028, your organization should have a field plan and a communications plan (including earned, paid, and social media) drafted to bring to your census coalition.

→ Advocate for a city (or town) staffer to be assigned to the decennial census full time.
2029

Census Milestones

→ Final census preparations, including in-field address canvassing and opening local census offices.

→ Recruitment continues for temporary census positions; hiring starts for local census office staff and address listers.

→ Continuation or launch of education and communications campaigns.

→ American Community Survey (ongoing).

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

→ Continue regular meetings to keep 2030 Census coalition members informed about key 2030 Census policy and operational developments and identify needs. (We recommend meeting once a month.)

→ Build relationships with your local Census Bureau offices to ensure effective investment strategies and constructive relationships between your census coalition and census officials.

→ Consider developing a rapid response network and/or monitoring disinformation. (Note that things will look much different for the 2030 Census, perhaps significantly so, from the 2020 Census. Utilize contemporary best practices from recent campaigns when building out this system.)

→ Utilize coordinated messaging, research, and database tools to finalize field and communications GOTC plans.
Promote applications for census local office and field positions when the Census Bureau begins hiring to help ensure that Census Bureau enumerators are representative of the communities they serve, which in turn will help meet the goal of a fair and accurate census.

Continue to identify media outlets, with an emphasis on local and ethnic media, that can partner with you on a 2030 Census campaign.

- Begin to identify and train a network of trusted messengers to promote the 2030 Census.

- Note that the Census Bureau cannot buy advertising with media outlets that do not have a US remit-to address. If those outlets are important to your community, look to develop and place ad campaigns with them independently.

Continue to work with key census partners (such as funders, elected officials, census officials, and CCCs), monitor decisions for the 2030 Census, and support efforts to adequately fund the Census Bureau.

By the end of 2029, all field and communications plans should be close to final to allow for easy implementation.

Start building train-the-trainer modules that will be used for engaging your coalition in GOTC.

Start identifying digital and relational organizing tools that can be used for GOTC.

Optional: By Spring 2029, 2030 Census messaging and materials should be finalized, including fact sheets, webinars, and other information sessions. Additionally, have in-language materials ready to go simultaneously with English-language resources.

Optional: By mid-2029, conduct another round of message testing for the 2030 Census and update your initial messaging guidance from 2027.

Optional: Offer subject matter assistance to your network and state and local elected officials through fact sheets, webinars, and one-on-one consultations.

Start building train-the-trainer modules that will be used for engaging your coalition in GOTC.
2030

Census Milestones

➜ 2030 Census peak operations (April 1, 2030, is Census Day).

➜ Hiring of field staff, including supervisors and enumerators (starting February/March).

➜ Coverage improvement, data processing, and quality check operations.

➜ Post-Enumeration Survey to measure census accuracy begins.

➜ American Community Survey (ongoing, even during the census year).

➜ Secretary of Commerce to transmit apportionment counts and results to the president by December 31, 2030; Census Bureau releases that information, along with national and state resident population totals, publicly at the same time.

Actions for Community-Based Organizations

➜ Begin implementation of communications and field organizing in January.

● Host a large-scale day of action on Census Day, April 1, 2030.

➜ Activate key partners for census engagement to get out the count, such as funders, elected officials, CCCs, community-based organizations, advocacy organizations, demographers, businesses, and more.

➜ Consistently update outreach materials, ensuring they are available in multiple languages and up-to-date on bureau or questionnaire changes, if there are any.

➜ Closely monitor 2030 Census implementation in real time to identify communities that might require additional assistance to ensure an accurate count, as well as unanticipated implementation challenges (such as cyber security scares) that might require additional communications efforts.

➜ Host at least one webinar during the height of census operations on implementation progress.