[Note: This is a sample letter for funders interested in responding to the June 8, 2018 Federal Register [notice](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/06/08/2018-12365/proposed-information-collection-comment-request-2020-census) on 2020 Census operations and calling on the Commerce Department to withdraw a citizenship question that has been added to the decennial survey. Everything suggested below is optional; feel free to draw on it, customize it, or add elements to your final comment letter. Highlighted areas below are for you to fill in text.]

**SAMPLE LETTER SAMPLE LETTER SAMPLE LETTER**

***[DATE, no later than August 7]***, 2018

Ms. Jennifer Jessup

Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer

Department of Commerce

Room 6616

14th and Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20230

Submitted [via regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=USBC-2018-0005)

RE: Comments on Proposed Information Collection on 2020 Census

Dear Ms. Jessup,

***[Insert organization name]*** writes in response to the June 8, 2018 [notice](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/06/08/2018-12365/proposed-information-collection-comment-request-2020-census) in the*Federal Register* requesting comments on the 2020 Census proposed information collection. We urge the Department of Commerce to withdraw the citizenship question from the 2020 Census questionnaire, as it will significantly undermine efforts to achieve a fair and accurate census.

Accurate and reliable census data are a necessary foundation for a well-functioning government, robust civil society, and thriving economy in the United States. As a grantmaking institution, we rely on census data to help identify and serve the needs of our community ***[insert “and our state” and/or “and the U.S. as a whole” if applicable for your organization]***. Our foundation exists to ***[insert mission].*** We provide grants that support ***[insert types of grants that are made]*.**

[OPTION 1: ***[Describe any funding your foundation has dedicated to supporting the decennial census or other Census Bureau efforts in the past, currently, or in the future. If your grantees are voicing concerns about their ability to encourage hard-to-count communities to fill out the census, you should add this. If these concerns stem from or are influenced by the citizenship question, you should mention that.]***

[OPTION 2: Our foundation, along with our grantees, uses census data to carry out our work. ***[Insert an example of how you or your grantees use census data. For example: “Our grantees use census data to determine demographic, economic, and social trends to better serve our community.” Or … “We support groups engaged in human services delivery, including programs such as Medicaid and Head Start. If the 2020 Census is inaccurate, then funding allocations for these programs will also be wrong for an entire decade, making it harder for our grantees to do their work.”]*** Census data are also essential to help plan for schools, public assistance, housing, health care, business development, and infrastructure.

[OPTIONAL PARAGRAPH IF CONCERNED ABOUT ISSUES BEYOND THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION: We are concerned that the Commerce Department is posing the citizenship question during a decennial census cycle when years of congressional underfunding have already undermined the Census Bureau’s ability to count every person, as required by the U.S. Constitution. The untested question is expected to impose significant financial costs on the bureau. Yet, funding constraints led to the cancellation of testing in rural areas and Puerto Rico in 2017 and the elimination of two of three “dress rehearsal” sites in 2018. The remaining “dress rehearsal” is underway and primarily testing IT systems. The cancellation of the other two tests – which were going to target vulnerable communities and populations – is of particular concern, as the 2020 Census will be the first to heavily rely on online survey responses. This new approach necessitates increased preparation and testing, not only for IT systems, but also for new advertising, community partnership, and outreach strategies. The lack of testing for these key operations leaves the Census Bureau unusually unprepared to prevent and mitigate shortcomings in 2020 Census implementation.]

Recent decennial censuses have resulted in net undercounts of many communities, including communities of great concern for our work. Addressing these undercounts is a monumental undertaking even in the best of times. Adding a citizenship question will make it even more complicated, costly, and difficult. ***[NOTE: There are undercounts in nearly all communities of color, young children (under age 5), rural areas, and low-income and migrant populations. You may wish to insert a sentence or two on why your foundation cares about reducing an undercount. For example: “***[***Young children***](http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/census/Fact-Sheet-Undercount-of-Young-Children.pdf) ***– especially young children in minority and immigrant families – have been one of the most undercounted groups in the decennial census for decades. An undercount of these households disadvantages their families, communities, and neighborhoods and diminishes their communities’ full voice in policy making. This is a key concern for our foundation which conducts grantmaking to address these inequities.”]***

Growing [distrust](https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/221171/americans-perceive-government-2017.aspx) of the government may make it even harder to achieve a fair and accurate count – particularly in immigrant and other hard-to-count communities. The Census Bureau’s own [research](https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2017-11/Memo-Regarding-Respondent-Confidentiality-Concerns.pdf) in 2017 found unprecedented concerns among immigrants and those living with immigrants about responding to census takers’ questions, due to fear that the information might be shared with other government agencies and used against them or their loved ones.

Despite these worries, the Commerce Secretary instructed the Census Bureau to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census survey. This was done in spite of Census Bureau staff warnings that adding the citizenship question would increase non-response rates for the 2020 Census, impair the accuracy of the data, and increase costs. The criticism has been bipartisan. Two former Commerce Department Secretaries – a [Republican and a Democrat](https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-04-04/u-s-census-is-not-about-citizenship) – oppose adding the question. [Six former Census Bureau directors](https://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2018/03/27/Editorial-Opinion/Graphics/DOJ_census_ques_request_Former_Directors_ltr_to_Ross.pdf), appointed by different political parties, also oppose adding the question, along with [mayors](https://www.usmayors.org/2018/03/27/nations-mayors-to-secretary-ross-dont-politicize-census-remove-the-citizenship-question/) and [other elected leaders](https://www.wsj.com/articles/democrats-hasten-to-challenge-citizenship-question-on-census-1522183609) from [both political parties](https://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2018/03/breaking_new_jersey_will_sue_trump_over_citizenshi.html). Academics also criticized the decision, pointing out that the Secretary’s decision was “[flawed](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/30/us/census-bureau-citizenship.html)” because the Census Bureau did not have an opportunity to test the question in the current political climate or for the decennial survey instrument that will be used in 2020.

The decennial census is an essential part of what helps this country fulfill its potential. The commitment to counting everyone once, only once, and in the right place is critical to our democracy and to accurate decision making. However, the last-minute citizenship question politicizes the 2020 Census and jeopardizes our nation’s ability to meet its constitutional mandate. The widely held belief that the added question is meant to adversely target their families will impact hard-to-count communities’ willingness to participate in the 2020 Census.

Given how much is at stake, we request that the Census Bureau remove the citizenship question from the 2020 Census. We also ask that the Census Bureau expedite its communications plans, include messages in multiple languages that convey the importance of filling out the census, and reinforce its pledge to uphold the confidentiality provisions already in law.

Thank you for your attention to our comments.

Sincerely,

***[Insert name of representative of your organization]***