

# SUPPORTING AN ACCURATE 2010 CENSUS IN HARD-TO-COUNT COMMUNITIES



**FUNDERS  
CENSUS  
INITIATIVE**

**Best Practices & Lessons Learned**

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FINAL REPORT



# SUPPORTING AN ACCURATE 2010 CENSUS IN HARD-TO-COUNT COMMUNITIES

## Best Practices and Lessons Learned

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Funders Census Initiative (FCI), an ad hoc coalition of foundations and philanthropic affinity groups, was a unique and unprecedented experiment both in scope and extent of collaboration. Foundations had supported census projects in the past, but the FCI represented the first time they formally shared strategies and information and pooled resources in a concerted effort to supplement the Census Bureau's own outreach and public education activities.

The Funders' Committee on Civic Participation (FCCP) helped FCI establish its focus and mission and provided the infrastructure through which foundations and affinity groups could discuss ideas, share experiences and information, and maximize their resources by reducing duplication of effort and identifying target areas with the greatest need. FCI was largely successful in achieving its goals in difficult economic times.

The primary goals were:

1. Stimulate interest in the 2010 census among foundations and philanthropic affinity groups;
2. Mobilize foundation resources in support of census outreach and promotion in historically hard-to-count communities; and
3. Facilitate investments in census activities through resource development, information sharing, subject matter and strategic advice, and direct consultation.

While the need for private funding far exceeded available resources, as evidenced by applications for funding, a review of foundation involvement in the 2010 census — achieved to a large degree with FCI support — reveals that funders and grantees alike benefited in both the short and long terms from the significant philanthropic investment in census activities.

Foundation-supported census campaigns were successful in many ways, from measurable outcomes (e.g. improved response rates) to less quantifiable but no less important improvements in collaboration among diverse community advocates. We do not yet have enough information to draw sound conclusions about the relative coverage of hard-to-count populations in the 2010 census, either nationally or in communities where foundations supported outreach and promotion campaigns. However, initial process and demographic indicators from the Census Bureau strongly suggest that the philanthropic community played a vital role in the 2010 Census, in ways that were likely to marshal participation and help improve census accuracy. These successes helped the Census Bureau complete the enumeration on time and under budget.

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The Census Bureau reported in January 2011 that the national 2010 Census participation rate exceeded the comparable rate for the 2000 Census.<sup>i</sup> Participation rates<sup>ii</sup> for neighborhoods where grantees implemented public education and outreach activities were, for the most part, higher in 2010 than in 2000; these mail-back rates also tended to show more improvement over the 2000 census than comparable rates for areas beyond the reach of funder supported outreach campaigns. For example, the Illinois 2010 Census Initiative reported that participation rates in the state, Cook County, and Chicago all increased over 2000, and that mail response in Chicago communities where grantees were active showed greater improvement over 2000 than comparable areas with no grantee activities, signaling the success of this unprecedented philanthropic collaboration. Foundations collaborating in various ways in other states reported similar outcomes.

In addition to these measurable successes, grantee and funder evaluations of their respective campaigns all concluded that their activities:

- Heightened visibility of the census among hard-to-count populations;
- Armed grassroots organizations with the information necessary to facilitate response among their constituents; and
- Served as a vital bridge between the Census Bureau and skeptical, distrustful communities.

Behind these achievements were a number of *best practices* from both funder and grantee perspectives. These included:

- Leveraging resources and sharing expertise through various levels of collaboration (e.g. among funders, among nonprofits, between funders and governmental units, and among advocates with national and local audiences).
- Setting measurable goals, such as target improvements in response rates, for grantees working in hard-to-count communities.
- Promoting collaboration among diverse census stakeholder organizations.
- Using 'trusted voices' and personal contacts to mobilize constituencies successfully.

The multi-year, multi-level philanthropic investment in the 2010 census also faced challenges and provided lessons that can guide similar projects in the future and help ensure the best use of resources, talent, and time. Significant challenges in the 2010 census cycle included:

- Insufficient monetary resources in some communities and a lack of any private resources in some areas.
- Poor communication with regional and local Census Bureau officials in some (but not all) areas.
- Unclear roles, expectations, and boundaries for community organizations working to promote census participation.

Going forward, funders can examine several lessons learned to help ensure even greater success during the 2020 census and beyond:

- Start earlier!

- Establish effective working relationships with relevant Census Bureau officials at the earliest stages of funder involvement, to build mutual understanding of respective goals and to establish appropriate roles and expectations for grantees.
- Leverage national expertise and materials more widely to maximize effective use of resources at the local level and minimize redundancy.
- Consider extended funding to support activities during door-to-door follow-up operations (Nonresponse Follow-up).

Beyond the clear successes of collaborative funding strategies and other philanthropic investments in support of Census 2010, the Funders Census Initiative cast a new and positive

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light on an often-overlooked but critical national undertaking. The broad uses of census data and universal nature of the enumeration position the census as an issue with unique capability to unite diverse community organizations and civic leaders behind a common goal and to promote leveraging of resources and expertise among advocates with different horizons (e.g. national v. local) and missions.

As funders look towards the future, they can build upon the growing interest in an accurate enumeration to encourage and facilitate wider use of census data among both foundations and advocates for underserved populations, to inform investments and to guide program development, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, but not unimportantly, funder and grantee experiences during the 2010 census can usefully inform strategies in support of other civic engagement and social- and economic-justice issues.





## HIGHLIGHTS OF FUNDER ACTIVITIES

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In 2009 and 2010, foundations and philanthropic affinity groups poured over \$33 million into educational and outreach activities aimed at mobilizing people in underserved communities to answer the census. This financial investment supported activities ranging from research and analysis, to national public education campaigns, to grassroots campaigns aimed at bringing census messages to people where they live, work, and worship.

### I. Research and Analysis

The Funders Census Initiative facilitated several research and analytical projects that provided invaluable information to help funders and, especially, grantees target their outreach activities and resources to areas considered hardest-to-enumerate based on historical patterns. FCI also produced numerous fact sheets for funders on key operational and strategic issues.

#### A. Fact Sheets

Dr. William O'Hare, a FCI consultant and Senior Fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation (a member of FCI's core group), provided early guidance to funders with several analyses of the geographic distribution of hard-to-count populations. Dr. O'Hare and his foundation colleague, Edwin Quiamboa, ranked states and counties by the number and percent of people living in historically hard-to-count areas, and analyzed the racial and ethnic (e.g. Hispanic origin) composition of these communities. The FCI presented the analyses on fact sheets that it made available to funders on its website and to census advocates through the websites of other stakeholder organizations such as The Census Project.

FCI also offered early guidance to the philanthropic community on effective ways for funders and affinity groups to promote census participation within their spheres of influence. It also catalogued useful resources and counseled funders on core operational topics, issuing fact sheets on census-related websites and local resources, census accuracy, response rates, the designation of hard-to-count areas, and key operational milestones in the census process.

#### B. Messaging Research

The Ford Foundation funded qualitative research by Hattaway Communications on barriers to census participation among African Americans and immigrants and messages to mobilize these hard-to-count populations to respond. With assistance from the FCI, Hattaway Communications presented its findings to other funders and to census advocates through several webinars and meetings; its report also was available on the FCI website.

### **C. Quantifying Census Benefits**

Funders understood that quantifying the benefits of an accurate census for specific communities would help their grantees successfully mobilize skeptical and fearful populations to participate in the count. The Hagedorn Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded a Brookings Institution analysis of federal grants allocated on the basis of census data, allowing census advocates across the country to cite specific program benefits of an accurate census and potential revenue losses to their respective states, counties, and metropolitan areas if the census missed people.

Funders and grantees liberally used the information in *Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Distribution of Federal Funds*<sup>iii</sup> to craft messages focusing on specific benefits of census participation; the media also cited the report's findings often.

The Hagedorn Foundation subsequently funded a companion analysis, *Surveying for Dollars: The Role of the American Community Survey in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds*<sup>iv</sup>, that informed stakeholders about data-driven grant allocations based on this continuous, census-related survey.

### **D. Hard To Count Mapping Site**

The Hagedorn Foundation also supported a popular and useful mapping initiative by the City University of New York (CUNY) Mapping Services, called the Census 2010 Hard To Count Mapping Database.<sup>v</sup> This online spatial tool displayed the demographic and socio-economic characteristics associated with historically hard-to-count communities, for geographic areas as small as census tracts, allowing census advocates to target their activities to neighborhoods most vulnerable to undercounting, and to create messages and outreach activities most likely to resonate with and reach these at-risk areas.

FCI consultants advised the database developers on text for the map and arranged several webinars for funders and grantees both to test the map's features before launch and to train national and local census advocates on use of the map to support their outreach campaigns. As the census commenced and the Census Bureau began reporting participation rates, FCI consultants helped CUNY staff prepare weekly reports analyzing response patterns and distribute the analyses to the media, funders, and advocates.

## **II. Collaborative Initiatives**

A hallmark of philanthropic support for the 2010 census was a collaborative approach to funding public education and outreach campaigns. As FCI consultant Kim Crews explained in her report on grant awards related to the 2010 census, funders followed several different models for supporting 2010 census projects. While the collaborative approach differed from

state to state, all of the initiatives represented successful partnerships between nonprofits, foundations and, in many cases, state and local governments and the corporate sector.

The FCI provided valuable subject matter expertise and strategic advice to both funders and grantees in all of the collaborative efforts summarized below, from the creation of each initiative through the grant award periods and continuing with the planning and execution of grantee projects. For example, FCI consultants reviewed draft Requests for Proposals (RFP) and

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advised funders on appropriate ways to allocate limited resources and to measure outcomes based on census methodology and operations. They also provided ongoing information about key census operational milestones to help funders establish suitable parameters for grantee reports and project timelines and for grantees to design effective campaigns and implement timely activities.

FCI consultants participated (in person or by phone and webinar) in numerous briefings to educate grantees about census operations and methods, relevant and effective messaging, and uses of census data. They also served as liaisons to Census Bureau officials at the national, regional, and local levels, helping to arrange briefings, meetings, and conference calls at appropriate points in the census process and to address concerns of grassroots advocates in the field.

#### **A. Illinois**

Illinois foundations established the model for collaborative funding of census outreach that foundations in several other states would replicate. With the Joyce Foundation taking the lead, ten Illinois foundations created the *Illinois 2010 Census Initiative* in the winter of 2009 and issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in early April 2009,<sup>vi</sup> committing \$1.2 million to this unprecedented statewide coordinated campaign to boost census participation in hard-to-count communities. The foundations hired a seasoned project manager consultant<sup>vii</sup> who had extensive experience working with both funders and nonprofits, to help foundation executives oversee the *Count Me In* campaign. Targeting 37 communities, the Initiative announced grants to 26 organizations ranging from \$10,000 to \$150,000, in early September 2009; 60 nonprofits would carry out the diverse range of projects to educate hard-to-reach populations about the importance of the census and to mobilize response.

#### **B. Long Island**

The Hagedorn Foundation, a “charter” member of the FCI, launched another successful funding collaboration in support of the census on Long Island, where the foundation is based. Following the Illinois template, the foundation pulled together five other significant Island-based grantmaking organizations to launch the *Count Me In: Ten for*

'10 campaign in an effort to boost census participation in communities most at risk of being undercounted.

The Long Island funders committed almost \$350,000 to their coordinated campaign, issuing an RFP in August 2009. As in other areas, interest among community organizations far exceeded available funds; the collaborative received 22 proposals totaling \$815,000. Initial grant awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$50,000 to 15 groups from the *Ten for '10* pool of resources. However, the Hagedorn Foundation helped five additional nonprofit organizations develop a joint proposal for the New York State Complete Count Grant Program; the state ultimately gave grants to two of those groups. The Hagedorn Foundation then committed or secured additional resources for the remaining three nonprofits, ensuring that 22 Long Island organizations eventually received grants totaling about \$605,000 for census outreach activities. In addition, the Hagedorn Foundation itself received a grant from New York State to develop advertising aimed at boosting census response in the African American community.

A highlight of the Long Island census initiative was the valuable partnership between philanthropy, the local business community, and local elected officials. The coalition of grantmakers secured in-kind donations and services from Island-based companies that helped expand and amplify the work grantees were doing on the ground to promote census participation. Some businesses donated goods that could be used as incentives for census participation, while others offered space for advertising and promotion, as well as printing services. Funders also successfully engaged the highest local elected officials in support of their activities.

### **C. New York City**

The 2010 Census Funders New York City (NYC) Initiative represented an especially successful partnership between philanthropy and local government. The New York Foundation (NYF) and New York Community Trust (NYCT) spearheaded the effort to build philanthropic interest in grantmaking to nonprofits serving the city's vast stretches of hard-to-count neighborhoods. Along with the City's 2010 Census Office, they hosted a meeting for prospective funders in June 2009, to discuss barriers to an accurate census in New York and why foundations should care. NYF and NYCT established a collaborative funding initiative, modeled on the Illinois project, to raise and allocate funds for local census outreach; it issued an RFP in October 2009.

The Initiative eventually raised \$562,000 for its collaborative funding pool. In close consultation with the City's census coordinator and with New York State, both of which separately funded census outreach in New York City, the Initiative awarded grants to 35 organizations. It hosted a meeting for its grantees on the eve of primary census operations,<sup>viii</sup> tapping the expertise of the New York City Planning Department and FCI to provide grassroots leaders with information on census operations and methods, hard-to-count communities, and effective messaging.

#### **D. Massachusetts**

As with the Illinois funders' census initiative, one foundation, the Access Strategies Fund, took its interest in an accurate census to other funders in Massachusetts; Access Strategies executive director Kelly Bates was drawn to the issue after attending FCCP and FCI meetings. Access Strategies established the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund (MCEF) in late summer 2009 and invited foundations to join a collaborative funding effort modeled on the Illinois experience but with a broader civic engagement scope that extended to post-census redistricting in the state. A video which documents this project can be viewed online via the Access Strategies Fund website at <http://www.accessstrategies.org/programs/massachusetts-census-equity-fund>.

The MCEF raised about \$500,000 from 12 foundations and awarded grants to 30 nonprofits working in 15 percent of the state's neighborhoods (e.g. census tracts), two-thirds of which the Census Bureau had designated as hard-to-count. Response to the MCEF RFP far exceeded the available resources, with more than 80 participants joining an informational conference call in early November 2009. The MCEF also hired an experienced consultant to help manage the initiative<sup>ix</sup>; it later hired a third-party firm to conduct and present an evaluation.

#### **E. California**

Funding for census outreach in California became all the more critical when the state made clear that its own investment in promoting the count would be severely curtailed due to budget woes. While the state's foundations chose not to pool their resources along the model of their peers in Illinois and other states, the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) took on a coordinating role for funders in California, providing a structure through which grantmakers and grantees could share ideas, information, and expertise; identifying populations and communities in the state that would benefit from an investment in grassroots outreach; reducing the likelihood of duplicative efforts; and serving as a bridge between census advocates, state and local government officials, and the Census Bureau. GCIR organized several meetings around this large state to build interest among funders and ensure the broadest possible dispersal of limited philanthropic dollars. Especially important was the role GCIR played in identifying funding gaps in the state and helping to secure additional resources from national and statewide funders to fill those needs. Both GCIR and representatives of several California-based foundations participated regularly in FCI meetings and sought strategic advice and topical assistance from FCI staff.

#### **F. Midwest**

In five Midwestern states—Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—funders pooled their resources through existing alliances of nonprofit organizations in

each state. The Joyce Foundation provided seed money and assistance with strategic development and funding proposals to the lead organizations in all of these states and worked to attract additional funding from both national and state-focused foundations, with initial fundraising goals ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000. (The Joyce Foundation funded three nonprofit advocacy groups in Illinois: Citizens Advocacy Center, Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, and the League of Women Voters Education Fund Illinois—separate from the Illinois 2010 census Initiative described earlier in this section.) The nonprofit alliances, in turn, administered subgranting activities in their respective states and also facilitated information sharing among grantees by leveraging their relationships with national networks and tables (such as the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network) and with state and local agencies.

### **G. Oregon**

The Grantmakers of Oregon and Southwest Washington (GOSW) initially highlighted the upcoming census for funders in that region, hosting a luncheon forum in May 2009 that featured presentations from Seattle Regional Census Office staff, a community advocate, and a FCI consultant. With encouragement from FCCP executive director Deb Ross, herself an Oregon resident, elected officials in Multnomah County and the City of Portland then approached foundations and corporations in the region to help fund outreach and promotion activities aimed at hard-to-count populations, especially the growing Asian and Latino immigrant communities. After hosting a briefing for civic and business leaders and assigning at least one dedicated staff person to coordinate its efforts, the county and city formed the Multnomah County Coalition, raised roughly \$150,000, and awarded nine grants to local nonprofits working with underserved populations. Most of the money, however, came from the local governments, suggesting that foundations are more likely to invest in a relatively obscure cause like the census if other grantmakers take the lead in establishing a structure for funding or at least a venue for sharing information and expertise.

### **H. Southwest Border Region**

Census outreach activities in the Southwest Border Region (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas) were coordinated to some extent through the Frontera Asset Building Network (FABN), itself a coalition of more than 50 organizations in underserved communities that helps coordinate the sharing of information and leverage community resources. FABN received a census grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in October 2009 and deployed a range of strategies to achieve its goal of ensuring an accurate census in the border region, including small grants;<sup>x</sup> partnerships with local, regional, and national advocacy organizations; e-newsletters; in-person and webinar trainings for civic leaders; an online clearinghouse for Census 2010 information; and extensive distribution of print materials.

Other foundations made individual grants to community-based organizations in the border region, most notably to groups that serve difficult-to-enumerate *colonias* that are home to hundreds of thousands of Mexican-American immigrants and farm workers. Some of these grants were made specifically with census outreach in mind, but it appears that some grassroots organizations used general operating funds to become involved in 2010 census mobilization efforts, making them less likely to have access to a broader range of information, expertise, and materials on the census.





## SUCSESSES AND BEST PRACTICES

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As an unprecedented effort to share ideas and expertise and, in some cases, to pool resources, FCI offers a window into funding strategies, learning opportunities, and capacity building that can help the philanthropic community confront similarly broad social challenges.

*First and foremost, the FCI's overall success was due, in large part, to the organizational and strategic skills of the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation.* The structure FCCP built for the initiative helped all participants maintain focus, promoted sharing while respecting the

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independence of funders, and provided an environment that could nurture new ideas. It is doubtful that as many funders would have come to the census table in the absence of a central source of information, expertise, and guidance.

*Second, the most successful campaigns clearly started with a genuine commitment to an accurate census on the part of at least one foundation, whichever funding model grantmakers chose to pursue in different geographic areas, as well as at the national level.* Funders clearly respect the opinions of their colleagues in the philanthropic arena and were more likely to consider census-related projects if other foundations presented the case for an investment.

Beyond these overarching lessons, funders and grantees pursued several strategies and practices that would help ensure successful census projects in the future.

### Leveraging Resources and Sharing Expertise

- Investments in shared resources, such as the Casey Foundation analyses of hard-to-count areas, the Brookings Institution research on census-driven federal grants, and the CUNY mapping database, provided valuable information for targeting and messaging to funders and grantees alike; the FCI made possible the broad distribution and effective use of these tools. At a training event in the Texas border region, for example, one grantee displayed a large check to the community featuring information from the Brookings Institution, attracting significant local media coverage for the organization's census activities. Funders and grantees (national and local) would have had great difficulty compiling this information on their own.
- Offering in-depth and timely information about census methods and operations, effective messaging, and grassroots strategies helped funders and prospective

grantees understand the respective roles they could play as part of an enormously complex and tightly orchestrated national undertaking.

- The collaborative approach to census funding — nationally through the FCI, and regionally — facilitated information sharing, strengthened ties for future endeavors, and limited redundancy across many planes: among funders; among nonprofits; between funders and governmental units; and among advocates with national and local audiences.

### **Setting Measurable Goals**

- Although many factors outside the control of community organizations can affect the accuracy of a census, census advocates agreed that setting clear response goals as one yardstick of success was a helpful tool in designing and executing their outreach plans.
- Funders could gauge the worthiness of their investments in census activities by evaluating the improvement in census participation in their respective areas of interest. Most funders reported improved (over 2000) participation rates in many, if not most, neighborhoods where grantees implemented public education and outreach activities; equally satisfying, these mail-back rates also tended to show greater improvement over the 2000 census than comparable rates for areas beyond the reach of funder supported outreach campaigns.

### **Building Capacity Through Collaboration**

- Community-based organizations that received grants through collaborative funding efforts reported almost universally that their involvement in census outreach strengthened their ties to other community groups and helped all of them leverage limited resources.
- Many grantee organizations were not previously involved in civic engagement work but appreciated the opportunity to tie civic activity to their core economic-justice focus (e.g. hunger; education; housing) and to empower their underserved constituencies through census participation.

### **Using ‘Trusted Voices’ and Personal Contacts to Mobilize Constituencies**

- Community-based organizations reported that personal contact in hard-to-count neighborhoods was the most successful strategy for reaching hard-to-count population groups. These activities included:
  - Phone banking;
  - Door-to-door canvassing;

- Census-themed block parties and picnics;
  - Informational tables and distribution of materials at grocery stores (large and small), laundromats, community and day care centers, and health clinics;
  - Visits to places of worship;
  - Establishing Questionnaire Assistance Centers and serving as testing centers for census job applicants.
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- Locally organized training workshops helped prepare a broader cadre of community leaders to mobilize their own constituencies when the census started. While these sessions often relied on information and materials prepared by national census advocates and experts, it was important to have local voices take the lead in organizing and conducting training forums.
  
  - Widespread anecdotal evidence suggests that promotional materials created and distributed by national and grassroots advocates often resonated more successfully with hard-to-count populations than did materials from the Census Bureau itself.



## CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **1. Start earlier!**

There was widespread agreement, in hindsight, that both funders and grantees would have benefited from having more lead-time to:

- a. Develop their strategies;
- b. Nurture interest among a broader set of funders through affinity groups and regional meetings;
- c. Establish important relationships with Census Bureau offices/officials;
- d. Conduct and disseminate useful research and analyses; and
- e. Fully educate personnel engaged in outreach initiatives about census operations and milestones.

For foundations, the 2010 census represented a test bed of sorts for a range of unprecedented funding strategies, which led to some delays in implementing plans and midstream revisions due to unanticipated constraints on external involvement in the census process. Undoubtedly, the work done for the 2010 census will provide a blueprint for foundation support of future censuses, thereby reducing uncertainty and streamlining the processes for organizing initiatives, identifying grantees, and disseminating vital information and materials.

While an unprecedented number of foundations provided financial support for vital outreach and public education activities in the nation's hard-to-count communities, it is likely that more funders would have considered similar investments if approached sooner. For example, the North Carolina-based Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation took an interest in the census after learning about FCI and, in partnership with a leading regional advocacy group, the Southern Coalition for Social Justice (SCSJ), hosted a meeting of key nonprofits and several funders in August 2009, in an effort to coordinate a statewide census initiative. The North Carolina Network of Grantmakers subsequently tried to engage other funders in the state but faced a relative lack of knowledge about the issue and insufficient time to educate its members before primary census operations started. The SCSJ and several other North Carolina-based nonprofits ultimately received grants from national funders, and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation awarded some grant money, but other state-based funding sources did not materialize.

Research projects supported by FCI participants proved to be invaluable resources for funders and grantees trying to target resources and messages to the hardest-to-enumerate communities. However, the hard-to-count mapping website was not fully operational until late January 2010, and the Brookings Institution report on census-driven federal grant allocations was issued in March 2010 (although Brookings staff made preliminary analyses for some geographic areas available to grantees, upon request from FCI, several months before official release of the report). Earlier funding for similar projects in the future would ensure that

foundations and grantees have access to this important information at a more timely point in the planning process.

**2. Establish effective working relationships with relevant Census Regional Offices at the earliest stages of funder involvement.**

Foundations and grantees realized during the early stages of their projects that effective working relationships with regional and local Census Bureau offices were essential to the success of their activities. Funders and nonprofits reached out to Census personnel in an effort to establish useful partnerships and define appropriate roles. Unfortunately, the quality and strength of these partnerships varied from region to region, with some census officials welcoming participation from community organizations and funders and others generally keeping external stakeholders at arms length, implying that extensive grassroots assistance in mobilizing census response was not fully welcome.

Given the uneven reception funders and grantees received in different census regions, it would be useful in the future for the philanthropic community to establish a broad and meaningful partnership with senior, national (e.g. headquarters) Census Bureau officials first. Perhaps through a meeting between the Census Director and Associate Directors for Decennial Census, Communications, and Field Operations and representatives of key foundations and affinity groups at least two years before the census year (e.g. early in 2018 for the 2020 census), the parties could define their respective roles clearly, discuss ways in which the other party could be helpful to achieving their respective goals, and establish clear channels for effective communication going forward.

**3. Leverage national resources (expertise; materials) more widely to maximize effective use of resources at the local level and minimize redundancy.**

As they began planning for their initiatives and activities, funders and grantees learned quickly that the census process is complex and that their involvement would be governed, to a not insignificant extent, by legal constraints and operational guidelines not uniformly or fully conveyed to them by Census Bureau staff. It is fair to say that the vast majority of community-based grantees had minimal knowledge of the census (beyond, perhaps, the basic reasons for the count and its general timing) at the start of their outreach campaigns. FCI played a vital role in educating funders and community leaders in a short period of time. It could, in the future, offer earlier, streamlined information via webinars and conference calls to address common issues related to census operations and milestones and to reach an even wider audience in a timely way.

National networks, such as the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network and other nonprofit tables were instrumental in disseminating vital, concrete information about the census to hundreds of community leaders around the country. National advocacy organizations involved in census education, such as the Leadership Conference Education Fund and its four national partners, reported overwhelming demand for their promotional materials from grassroots

advocates; some of these groups also served as “trouble shooters,” helping to resolve operational glitches and marshal assistance from the Census Bureau using their longstanding relationships with the agency. Funders should continue to support these nationally focused education campaigns and to encourage a more consistent sharing of information between national and local advocates in ways that do not undermine the autonomy and important role of community leaders.

**4. Consider extended funding to support activities during door-to-door follow-up operations (Nonresponse Follow-up).**

In many areas, collaborative funding of census outreach focused primarily or exclusively on the mail-out/mail-back phase of the census, with grantees working to boost census response in the enumeration’s first large operation. In underserved communities, however, the census is likely to miss a greater proportion of residents in this phase, requiring an equally intense effort to promote cooperation during the second major operation, Nonresponse Follow-up, which continues for at least two months beyond the point at which some funding initiatives ended their commitment. Foundations should consider the complete census calendar when funding census campaigns at both the national and community levels, and perhaps encourage greater sharing of information and materials as a way to preserve and stretch limited resources over a longer period of time even more.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

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The success of the Funders Census Initiative in raising the profile of the census in the philanthropic community, and the success of philanthropic grantees in mobilizing hard-to-count populations to participate in the census, are especially notable in light of socio-economic conditions that strained foundation resources and led many census experts to conclude that it would be difficult to match Census 2000 response rates. Working together, funders and census advocates at the national, regional, and local levels overcame barriers such as greater racial, ethnic, and language diversity; contentious national and local debates over immigration policy; heightened concerns about personal privacy since September 11th and in the Internet age; high unemployment and foreclosure rates as a result of the stubborn recession; and declining survey response rates generally -- and played a decisive role in boosting participation over 2000.

Equally important, the FCI helped launch new models for funding that benefited foundations and grantees alike. Foundations learned from each other (as we saw with the template Illinois created for a collaborative census campaign), shared information about funding gaps, and strengthened ties to the philanthropic community in their respective regions. Community-based grantees universally reported that the opportunity to work collaboratively with other grassroots organizations was a highlight of their experience and would strengthen their work on many social and economic justice issues going forward. National grantees were grateful for the opportunity to expand their local and regional ties and to build models for public education campaigns in the future.

The Funders Census Initiative represented the most comprehensive commitment of philanthropy to date in the success of the census, a cornerstone of America's democracy and a door to equal political and economic opportunity for underserved communities. The philanthropic community deserves recognition for devoting significant resources to this once obscure issue. Foundations can now build on the relationships they established or expanded through this Initiative -- with community organizations, national advocates, other funders, and the Census Bureau itself -- to build an even stronger, more effective network of support for the next national enumeration and the related, ongoing activities to chronicle the progress of our population and to measure the condition of our communities.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> The final 2010 Census participation rate of 74 percent equaled the 2000 Census participation rate for the short form, sent to roughly five out of six addresses. The 2010 Census rate, however, was actually higher than the overall 2000 Census rate, which included mail response among households that received either the short or long questionnaires.

<sup>ii</sup> *Participation rates* reflect the percentage of *households* (e.g. occupied housing units) that returned a census form by mail. The Census Bureau published participation rates for two of the three primary enumeration methods it used in 2010; it employed the same methods in 2000. “Mail-out/mail-back” covers most of the country; census forms are mailed to residential addresses, and residents mail them back. “Update/Leave” is used in rural and other communities without traditional city-style addressing; census workers hand-deliver (e.g. “leave”) census forms to residential addresses and update the address list and maps as they go, to help ensure full coverage and correct geographic location of homes. “Update/Enumerate” is used on most American Indian reservations and in Alaska Native villages, many *colonias* along the U.S.-Mexico border, and in other remote and seasonally-occupied communities.

<sup>iii</sup> Andrew Reamer, Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program, March 2010 ([http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0309\\_census\\_dollars.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0309_census_dollars.aspx)).

<sup>iv</sup> Andrew Reamer, Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program, July 2010 ([http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0726\\_acs\\_reamer.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0726_acs_reamer.aspx)).

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.censushardtocountmaps.org/>. In-kind IT support for this project was provided by the CUNY Graduate Center.

<sup>vi</sup> The Initiative received more than 75 proposals in response to the RFP.

<sup>vii</sup> Alice Cottingham

<sup>viii</sup> The grantee meeting was originally scheduled for February 10 but was postponed until March 8 due to bad weather.

<sup>ix</sup> Suzanne Maas

<sup>x</sup> FABN received 27 applications and awarded small grants to 16 community organizations in four states.

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