

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



**FUNDERS  
CENSUS  
INITIATIVE**

**A Plan to Engage the Philanthropic  
Community in Census 2020 and  
Leverage the Benefits of Census 2010**

Presented by Funders Census Initiative consultants Kimberly Crews, Terri Ann Lowenthal and William O'Hare, and Deb Ross, Executive Director, Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

May 2011 | Final Report



## OVERVIEW

---

The Funders Census Initiative (FCI) represented an unprecedented effort by the philanthropic community to support a fair and accurate 2010 Census and to reduce the undercount of historically hard-to-count populations using two primary approaches:

1. Sharing information, knowledge, and ideas among funders and their grantees with an interest in civic engagement and social and economic justice; and
2. Providing individual and collaborative grants to national and grassroots nonprofits to conduct census outreach and promotion in hard-to-count communities.

The Census Bureau and the media publicly recognized the philanthropic community's valuable role in support of the 2010 Census. The Census Director acknowledged collaborative foundation census initiatives during several press briefings and encouraged expanded foundation interest in the census during an FCI-organized tele-briefing for the funder community. There were numerous news stories highlighting the importance of funder support for local census outreach campaigns in both print and broadcast media.

Through FCI, the philanthropic community established itself as an important and committed census stakeholder willing to "put its money where its mouth is" to meet a widely recognized challenge: helping to ensure equality of political representation and economic opportunity by improving the accuracy of the census among disadvantaged populations, notably people of color (including young children), low-income households, and immigrants. In hindsight, foundations involved in FCI universally agreed that an earlier start to their activities would have yielded even greater success in positively influencing participation rates in historically undercounted communities. Accordingly, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) and its census consultants propose an ongoing project to build upon and sustain the constructive work that foundations implemented during the 2010 Census.

**We envision three overarching goals for the Funders Census Initiative from 2011 – 2020:**

- I. Establish the philanthropic community and grantees as recognized, knowledgeable stakeholders in planning and conducting the 2020 census.**
- II. Ensure an effective role for the philanthropic community and grantees in planning, preparing for, and conducting the next decennial census.**
- III. Facilitate the ongoing use of census, American Community Survey (ACS), and other Census Bureau data by foundations and their grantees.**

Underlying this plan is the belief that philanthropy can serve as a respected, unbiased and effective link between the Census Bureau and nonprofit communities, fostering a stronger partnership between the public and private sectors that can help ensure sufficient resources and appropriate strategies for the census in the nation's most underserved communities. The nascent collaborative effort for the 2010 Census demonstrated the promise of this partnership and laid the groundwork for a more permanent and timely role for foundations in the design, planning, preparation, and conduct of the decennial census and the related, ongoing American Community Survey. Given the cyclical nature of the decennial census, philanthropy's support of this vital civic activity would require varying levels of commitment and attention at different points in the decade, but continuous involvement would help foundations and their nonprofit partners address issues of concern to disadvantaged communities in a timely way.

Below we offer more detail on how the philanthropic community can achieve the three overarching goals outlined on the previous page. The work we propose is modeled on the very successful FCI effort for mobilizing funders and their grantees around participation in the 2010 Census. This includes an organizational and administrative structure provided by the Funders' Committee on Civic Participation (FCCP) and several subject matter experts working through that infrastructure with foundations and their grantees.

Our proposed approach takes advantage of the lessons learned over the past two years, working collectively and one-on-one with foundations and their grantees on the 2010 Census. Equally important, it builds on the many critical relationships established over that period.

## GOAL I

**Establish the philanthropic community as a recognized, knowledgeable stakeholder in planning and conducting the 2020 decennial census** (which includes the ongoing American Community Survey).

---

The philanthropic community's foray into the 2010 Census was, for all practical purposes, unplanned and unanticipated during the lengthy and important period of research, testing and planning leading up to the decennial count. Despite their late entry into the census arena, however, funders made a positive impression on senior Census Bureau officials and civic leaders, and a measurable contribution to the 2010 Census.

### **To accomplish this goal, we will:**

1. **Continue to develop and expand the Funders Census Initiative website.** Through FCCP, the site will serve as a repository for information from the 2010 Census campaigns and as a "bulletin board" for current information on policy and technical issues affecting planning for the 2020 Census. The website will feature (but not be limited to):
  - a) Evaluations of FCI-related activities during the 2010 Census;
  - b) Fact sheets and analyses prepared by FCI staff on key issues of interest to Initiative participants and the broader philanthropic community;
  - c) Updates on policy and design developments affecting the census and ACS;
  - d) Information on research, testing, planning, preparation, and implementation of the 2020 Census and the ACS;
  - e) Notable news articles and other relevant external materials relating to the census; and
  - f) Exemplary uses of census data and training methods by grantees.
2. **Arrange meetings with appropriate officials** at the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Office of Management and Budget (which oversees federal statistical policy), and appropriate congressional committee members and staff, to discuss the role of philanthropy in supporting the decennial census.
3. **Seek opportunities to publicly discuss philanthropy's interest in and support for the census.** Examples of such opportunities include testimony at congressional oversight hearings, discussions with reporters covering the census, and op-eds authored by foundation or affinity group officials, all highlighting the importance of an accurate census in historically hard-to-count communities and ways in which philanthropy can support this goal.

4. **Attend meetings and conferences of key stakeholder organizations** when the agenda includes discussions about census and ACS planning and implementation, in order to establish and maintain useful relationships and have access to a broad range of expertise and perspectives. Important stakeholder gatherings might include meetings of scientific associations (e.g. American Statistical Association, Population Association of America, and Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics); civil rights groups (e.g. Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Census Task Force); and state and local government associations (e.g. U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties).
  
5. **Identify opportunities to keep the broader philanthropic community informed** about key planning decisions and policy issues affecting the 2020 Census. Activities could include presentations and distribution of materials at affinity group meetings, webinars at key points in the planning process, and tele-briefings to highlight important data releases from the 2010 Census and ongoing ACS.

## GOAL II

**Ensure an effective role for the philanthropic community and grantees in planning, preparing for, and conducting the next decennial census.** Focus should be on design, methodological, operational, and policy decisions that will continue to improve census accuracy in historically hard-to-count communities in planning and conducting the 2020 decennial census (which includes the ongoing American Community Survey) and ensure the continued availability of reliable socio-economic data that support foundation initiatives in the civic engagement and social- and economic-justice arenas.

---

Hindsight is a great teacher. As the Census Bureau begins the research and design phase of the next count, both the Bureau and funders now have a timely opportunity to consider an appropriate and increasingly effective role for philanthropy in the 2020 Census.

The Census Bureau and funders are conducting numerous (independent) evaluations of their 2010 Census activities, providing a solid body of evidence with which to assess research-based and outcome-measured best practices that can inform future census methods and operations. The Bureau's 2020 Census design program would benefit enormously from studying and incorporating ideas from funders who themselves have reviewed their 2010 Census work with a critical eye. This goal recognizes the value of discussion and interaction between funders, the Census Bureau, and key stakeholders in order to take full advantage of lessons learned from 2010, as well as the funders' unique connection to community-based organizations that were on the front line of census outreach in hard-to-count communities.

In addition, late entry into the planning process left many funders and grantees frustrated, unable to effect change with respect to content and methods that their experiences in the field suggested might have improved census operations and boosted participation. Even before the Census Bureau publishes results from the 2010 Census, it is putting in place a new structure to facilitate broader involvement in the planning process for external stakeholders. Reorganization under the Bureau's Communications Directorate includes a new Office of External Engagement, which will oversee advisory committees and national partnerships, and a Center for New Media and Promotion. Both initiatives could offer expanded opportunities for funders and key grantees to influence the direction and scope of research and planning for the 2020 Census and related American Community Survey.

Early discussions suggest there will be very significant methodological and operational changes in the 2020 Census, propelled by the unsustainable upward trajectory in the cost of the decennial count. Reducing (or at least holding steady) the cost of the census, partly through greater reliance on administrative records and newer technologies such as the Internet and smartphones, has already been flagged as the key design driver for the 2020 Census. These prospective changes in counting methods have major implications for historically hard-to-enumerate populations.

**To accomplish this goal, we will:**

1. **Explore the possibility and desirability of having the Census Director appoint the Funders Census Initiative (or a representative foundation) to serve on a census advisory committee.** This will help to establish a more formal role in the census planning process for the philanthropic community. The Census Bureau dissolved the existing Census Advisory Committee in February 2011, and it is currently seeking advice on the composition and focus of future advisory committees.
2. **Attend meetings of the various Census Bureau advisory committees** (usually held biannually) and report on important research findings, stakeholder debates and policy issues.
3. **Monitor congressional oversight of the Census Bureau and legislative activity,** including annual appropriations bills, which would affect the Census Bureau's ability to carry out an accurate census in 2020. Advise funders and grantees on strategies for ensuring appropriate policy decisions related to the census and for educating lawmakers about the importance of an accurate census in historically disadvantaged communities.
4. **Keep funders, grantees and other stakeholders informed about important milestones and developments in the 2020 Census planning, preparation and implementation phases** by resuming e-mail circulation of the popular *Census News Briefs* produced by FCI consultant Terri Ann Lowenthal. To ensure a thorough understanding of key issues, FCI consultants must closely monitor a range of resources and participate in activities of importance to the broad stakeholder community, including (but not limited to):
  - a. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports
  - b. Commerce Inspector General (OIG) reports and investigations
  - c. National Academy of Sciences reports and panel meetings
  - d. *Federal Register* notices related to decennial census/ACS activities
  - e. U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Census evaluation reports
  - f. U.S. Office of Management and Budget/Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs activities (OMB/OIRA has jurisdiction over federal statistical policy, including categories for the collection of data on race and ethnicity, and Paperwork Reduction Act compliance, which affects all federal surveys)
  - g. Congressional hearings

- h. Expert reports on census methods and operations published by independent stakeholder organizations such as the Population Reference Bureau, Population Resource Center, Asian-American Justice Center, Pew Research Center, and many other interested parties.
5. **Monitor the development and progress of significant design, content, methodological and operational decisions** that are of special interest to funders and their grantees.

Those issues are likely to include:

- a. Review of official federal race and ethnic categories by OMB and consideration of alternative race, ethnicity, and ancestry questions on the 2020 Census and ACS questionnaires. In 2010, stakeholders expressed concern or confusion about (1) a lack of Black subgroup check-off options (e.g. Caribbean and African nationalities), (2) inability of Arab Americans to identify themselves apart from the “White” category, and (3) treatment of Hispanic as an “ethnicity,” not a race.
- b. Census residence rules, which govern where people are counted. Civil rights advocates have focused growing attention on where prisoners are counted (currently at their place of incarceration).
- c. Proposed legislation to establish a five-year fixed term for the Census Director and to give the Census Bureau more autonomy by establishing a direct line of reporting from the Census Director to the Secretary of Commerce (the Director currently reports to an Under Secretary of Commerce).
- d. Proposed legislation to make ACS response voluntary, which could significantly diminish the reliability of these vital socio-economic data.
- e. Collection and reporting of data on same-sex married couples, in light of a growing number of state laws allowing same-sex marriage.



## GOAL III

**Facilitate the ongoing use of census, American Community Survey (ACS) and other Census Bureau data by foundations and grantees** in order to support civic engagement and social- and economic-justice initiatives.

---

The philanthropic community has funded activities that promote an accurate census for a number of reasons, including a desire to ensure the fair allocation of political representation and government resources, as well as appropriate private sector investment in historically underserved communities. Foundations have recognized the value of comprehensive, accurate, and accessible demographic, social, economic, and housing data to the broad range of work they and their grantees undertake. The information also helps funders determine how to target their resources and to measure the effectiveness of their initiatives.

Funders should get as much out of the census as they put into it; that is, they should be well-positioned to access, understand, and use data from the census and ACS to support their ongoing missions and immediate projects. Building on the relationships we built with funders during the 2010 census, FCI will provide ongoing assistance to foundations and grantees selected by the foundations, as the Census Bureau publishes a wide array of data from the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey. Educational activities could include on-line workshops and tele-briefings to keep funders informed about the availability of key data sets and appropriate uses of the data. FCI staff also will be available to respond to individual queries from funders.

The Funders Census Initiative also expects funders and their census grantees to have ongoing questions about the results of the 2010 Census. FCI staff will keep funders informed about Census Bureau programs to measure census coverage and accuracy, as well as the Count Question Resolution Program, which allows state, local, and tribal officials to challenge census results under three specific circumstances related to suspected errors in boundaries, geocoding (e.g. placement) of living quarters, and coverage (e.g. specific housing units or group quarters that should have been included but were not due to processing errors, or are duplicates).

### **To accomplish this goal, we will:**

1. **Organize and host one or two webinars annually, coinciding with the release of significant Census Bureau data sets**, to educate funders on the availability of important data and how to access, use, and interpret the data in ways that will enhance the broader work and goals of their foundations.
2. **Prepare fact sheet(s) explaining the availability of and difference between data sets** from the decennial census, American Community Survey, and annual population estimates program.

3. **Prepare fact sheet(s) on census accuracy**, as measured by the Demographic Analysis program and Census Coverage Measurement survey. Final evaluation of 2010 Census accuracy is not expected until 2012.
  
  4. **Keep funders and their grantees informed about the Count Question Resolution Program** (which will run from June 1, 2011 – June 1, 2013) and ways in which community-based organizations can assist state, local and tribal officials in challenges suspected errors in placement of housing units and group quarters.
-

## BUDGET

---

The Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) will develop an appropriate budget to cover the costs of carrying out the work described in this plan (or any portion of this work that foundations would like to support) in consultation with interested funders and the expert consultants who would help implement a long-term census engagement program for the philanthropic community. Anticipated costs of an ongoing initiative include (1) funding for FCCP to provide organizational infrastructure to facilitate the website, conference calls, webinars and similar activities, as well as strategic advice and administrative oversight; and (2) funding to support expert consultants.

For more information, please contact:

- Deb Ross, Executive Director, FCCP: [dross@funderscommittee.org](mailto:dross@funderscommittee.org)
- Kimberly Crews, FCI Consultant: [kim.crews@verizon.net](mailto:kim.crews@verizon.net)
- Terri Ann Lowenthal, FCI Consultant: [TerriAnn2K@aol.com](mailto:TerriAnn2K@aol.com)
- William O'Hare, FCI Consultant: [WOhare@aecf.org](mailto:WOhare@aecf.org)