



CENSUS EQUITY INITIATIVE

Promoting Equitable Data for Representation and Resources

April 2022

Although the 2030 census is eight years away, we face an urgent need right now to fix the way people of color, young children and other historically undercounted populations are counted by the Census Bureau.

An accurate population count is the foundation for full access to our democracy for historically underrepresented communities as well as for the fair allocation of public resources. The decennial census and American Community Survey (ACS) undergird voting rights policies and litigation, drive redistricting decisions, and shape access to polling places, in-language ballot materials, and voting assistance. The data are also used directly and indirectly in the distribution of approximately \$1.5 trillion of federal funding annually and are used to determine service delivery needs at every level of government.

Initial analyses of the 2020 census data by the Census Bureau indicate that populations historically undercounted in the census – young children and many communities of color, among others – were substantially undercounted in the 2020 census, while non-Hispanic whites were overcounted. For example, the estimated undercount of Latinos is 5 percent, of Blacks is 3.3 percent, of American Indians living on reservations is 5.6 percent and of young children is 2.8 percent.¹ Moreover, the count for these populations in 2020 was less accurate than in 2010 – for example, the undercount of Latinos tripled compared to the 2010 count.

While concerning, many recognize that the undercount could have been much worse – given the challenges of the pandemic, wildfires and hurricanes, earlier efforts to include a citizenship question on the survey, and underfunding – were it not for the efforts of a multitude of nonprofits, philanthropic entities, state and municipal governments.

Now steps need to be taken this year to assure that resource allocations and other decisions determined by census data address the undercount and utilize appropriate data and analyses to maximize accuracy and equity. In addition, upcoming policy and operational decisions will shape the American Community Survey (ACS), administered throughout the decade, as well as the 2030 census. Key issues include questions regarding race and ethnicity, particularly for Hispanic/Latino populations and those of Middle Eastern/North African descent, questions about gender identity, policies to address the undercount of young children, and survey administration and data collection issues.

Building on the unprecedented collaboration of over 100 funders that came together to promote an accurate 2020 census count,² funders have united to continue the work under a rebranded effort, designed with the input of national and state-based funders and nonprofits, called the

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, March 2022: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/coverage-measurement/pes/national-census-coverage-estimates-by-demographic-characteristics.pdf>.

² Funders' Committee for Civic Participation, Learning and Evaluations: <https://funderscommittee.org/learning-evaluations/>.

Census Equity Initiative. We have adjusted the CEI strategy to address the urgency demanded by the new information about the 2020 undercount.

The Census Equity Initiative is dedicated to ensuring that ACS and census data is high quality and fairly counts historically undercounted populations as an underpinning of equitable access to democratic participation and the fair allocation of resources.

The Census Equity Initiative aims to raise roughly \$4 million per year through 2024 to support two main areas of work: (a) Address census policy and operations, and (b) Sustain collaboration and aligned action.

A. Census Policy and Operations

Numerous policy issues related to the decennial census and ACS need to be addressed now. Key issues include identifying ways to rebase the 2020 count to ensure fair distribution of government funding for programs serving marginalized people; improving questions regarding race and ethnicity, particularly for Hispanic/Latino populations and those of Middle Eastern/North African descent so that there is more accurate data; adding new questions about sexual orientation and gender identity; changing policies to address the undercount of young children and other data collection issues.

For example, there will be a major challenge to the basic design of the 2030 census and other surveys and issues related to the potentially greater use of administrative and commercial data. While use of administrative may be needed, there are concerns that such data are insufficient for key purposes (such as the count of young children, historically undercounted populations, immigrants, and race and ethnic data), even among those who promote the use of administrative data.

We also expect legislative proposals over the next few years that will harm census operations. Almost certainly there will be proposals to add a citizenship or legal immigration status question or even to exclude non-citizens or undocumented from the decennial count. There may be attempts to modify Title 13 of the U.S. Code, which is the statute guiding all census work. Civil rights advocates are concerned that the Bureau may consider removing the race and ethnicity question from the decennial questionnaire. We can also expect proposals to weaken the ACS such as ones to reduce the sample size (if not make the ACS voluntary), at a time when advocates believe the sample size needs to be expanded to address the expected data quality issues regarding small populations, such as Native Americans and Arab Americans.

We know that Congress is already debating funding for the Census Bureau, the annual ACS, and the 2030 census. Additionally, research and monitoring of the quality of the 2020 census data may require mitigation strategies. All of this requires educating members of Congress about the importance of the census. And changes in who serves in Congress will require a multi-year effort to educate new members and staff on the critical Senate and House committees about the census and win new champions. These issues also require strengthening relationships with the Census Bureau and maintaining ongoing dialogue.

The Census Equity Initiative has begun to provide modest support to organizations addressing these issues. These leading national groups, which have continued their coalition called Census Counts, also inform other census advocates at the national and state levels and help them engage as appropriate. Leaders of Census Counts include:

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
- NALEO Educational Fund
- National Urban League

- The Leadership Conference Education Fund

The Census Equity Initiative aims to bolster support to these organizations and fund others who are exercising important roles in research, policy development, advocacy, coordination, and communications toward the goal of fair and accurate census and ACS.

B. Census Collaboration and Aligned Action

A crucial part of the 2020 effort was the infrastructure developed within states and across state and national efforts to “Get Out the Count” and promote policies and actions for a fair count. To sustain collaboration and aligned action, the Census Equity Initiative is supporting the following:

- 1. State-based organizing through the Census Equity Fund.** The Census Equity Fund supports state-based groups and coalitions to continue engagement on census issues, including bringing in new stakeholders into these efforts, through activities such as the following:
 - Educate and engage community groups, the media and policymakers on important census and American Community Survey (ACS) issues. Groups may engage in public education, communications, submitting comments to the Census Bureau, weighing in with policymakers at the state and federal levels, and other actions.
 - Highlight the importance of the decennial census and ACS for community resources and decision-making among state and local government officials, community members, service providers, business leaders and others so that relevance and saliency doesn't need to be rebuilt each decade. This includes sharing data on the regional impact of census participation, publishing reports using census 2020 and ACS data, conducting trainings on how to use census and ACS data in their own work, and promoting the Census Bureau's Statistics in Schools program.
 - Develop a plan for reaching historically undercounted populations in the next decennial census. Informed by 2020 outreach lessons, groups might begin building and implementing plans to engage hard to reach populations to keep the census top of mind. This may also include addressing the digital divide.
 - Leverage state and local funding for the census. This is primarily aimed at encouraging philanthropic institutions to continue supporting census activities within the state. Some groups also might advocate for state or local government funding to continue educating the public about the importance of the ACS and decennial census.
- 2. Census coordination/communication mechanisms.** Support Census Counts – coordinated by The Leadership Conference Education Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, NALEO Educational Fund and National Urban League – to continue their critical field coordination role. Additionally, support the States Count Action Network (S-CAN), led by The Leadership Conference Education Fund and State Voices, to inform and connect state-based census partners.
- 3. Information sharing and field learning.** We will continue to hold 1-3 meetings per year. The census quarterly meetings related to the 2020 census campaign became a vehicle for strengthening the census collaborative by providing opportunities for stakeholders, funders and representatives from state and local government associations

to connect and share information with one another. Other efforts to build capacity of state and local nonprofits working on census will be considered.

4. **Philanthropic outreach.** We will continue to provide census education and outreach within the funder community, especially important given staff and board turnover over the decade. This includes providing information on how census issues directly relate to foundations' missions and strategies.

CEI Governance and Funding

The Census Equity Initiative is a project of New Venture Fund (NVF), a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor that hosts over 160 projects. NVF collaborates with change leaders to build a fair, healthy and sustainable world for all people. NVF helps implement a range of public-interest projects on issues such as conservation, global health, public policy, international development, education, disaster recovery, and the arts. Using the fiscal sponsorship model, NVF ensures that leaders have the operational assistance and expertise they need to drive change.

The CEI is guided by a Steering Committee comprised of the following foundations: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bauman Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, Joyce Foundation, The JPB Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Unbound Philanthropy, Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Funders have the choice of providing grants directly to organizations/projects identified in this plan or providing a grant to the pooled fund at New Venture Fund or both. The Census Equity Initiative budget is approximately \$4 million annually. We have raised \$1.9 million for 2022 and are seeking to raise an additional \$1.9 million from partner foundations for 2022 and \$3.5 million for 2023.

CEI Team

For further information, please contact:

Gary Bass, Lead Consultant, gbass@baumanfoundation.org
Amy Dominguez-Arms, Senior Advisor, amydarms@gmail.com
Karen Narasaki, Consultant, karen@narasakijustice.com