

# **CENSUS EQUITY INITIATIVE**

## **Continuing the Census Collaborative: 2021-2024**

May 3, 2021

(DRAFT: Feedback Welcomed)

### **Executive Summary**

The Census Equity Initiative will continue the census collaborative that was created in the build-up to the 2020 decennial census. The focus of CEI is to ensure that census data is high quality and properly counts historically undercounted populations. CEI hopes to raise about \$3.8 million per year through 2024 to support two main activities: (a) Addressing census policy and operations, and (b) Sustaining collaboration and aligned action. The initiative would incorporate a feedback system to adapt and improve CEI operations throughout the course of the initiative.

Roughly \$1.3 million per year in grants would be reserved for census policy and operational issues, including on the 2030 decennial census and the American Community Survey. Grantmaking to national organizations would be done in a manner that allows flexibility in responding to emerging issues. Roughly \$1.2 million per year would be allocated to the Census Equity Fund, which would provide grants within states to help address federal policy issues related to the census as well as state-specific needs related to the 2030 census, the American Community Survey, or other related census products.

Remaining funds would be used to support philanthropic outreach to encourage participation in the CEI, capacity-building among state and local census coalitions, an assessment or feedback loop so that CEI can be responsive and effective, and initiative expenses such as convenings and staffing.

### **Background**

Over the past six months, the Census Subgroup, which steered the census funder collaborative, has heard from census stakeholders and funders alike of the need to continue the census collaborative. Moreover, surveys and interviews conducted during an independent evaluation of the 2020 census campaign confirmed there is widespread interest from both stakeholders and funders to continue the census collaborative. In fact, 84% of state and local groups say they are planning to engage in the 2030 census and more than 9 in 10 funders say the collaborative should continue, demonstrating keen interest in staying involved. Accordingly, the Census Subgroup has been discussing approaches for continuing work on census issues based on input received.

Many have pointed out that the Census Bureau will need to address some key issues, such as the scope and content of the 2030 survey, how some aspects of the count will be conducted (e.g., prison gerrymandering), how the survey will be delivered, and various issues related to the American Community Survey, in the very near term. Others also noted that we have a possibly time-limited opportunity with the new federal administration to enact favorable changes. That means we cannot wait until mid-decade to build a census initiative.

Moreover, numerous census stakeholders and funders have emphasized the importance of continuity, given the extensive networking, coalitions, and collaboration developed during the 2020 census. Several highlighted the value of institutionalizing engagement in the census as a sustained priority for funders and nonprofits alike, rather than needing to relaunch it each

decade. Furthermore, some note that rebuilding these communications channels and relationships from scratch in 2025 will be challenging and quite likely more costly than maintaining modest annual investment.

The challenge in continuing the census collaborative is not finding issues to address or drumming up interest among census stakeholders; it is finding the funding to sustain the work. Initial communication with funders suggests a census “lite” plan at around \$3.8 million per year that covers the years 2021 through 2024 might be possible, but to be clear, we do not have those funds in hand. Even if our anticipated level of funding materializes, it will clearly not be enough funding to do all the things we know might need to be done – and it will not be enough to fund all the groups we know ideally need to be funded. Strategic decisions will be necessary.

This document presents a census “lite” plan – called the Census Equity Initiative – that would guide the work through 2024. We hope that funders and stakeholders will again agree on a broader plan by the end of 2025 that provides a glide path through the 2030 census, but this plan focuses only on the first part of the decade.

This Census Equity Initiative plan has been reviewed by 34 national and state-based funders and grantees (see Attachment A for list of people interviewed) plus individuals from the 13 foundations serving on the Census Subgroup. While some who reviewed the plan may have specific items they would like added to the plan, there was widespread support for CEI. All are appreciative of the idea of continuing the census collaborative and not have to restart things around mid-decade. All want CEI to move forward.

## **Main Components of the Census Equity Initiative**

Like work on the 2020 census, CEI is built on the belief that stakeholders and funders will need to work together to leverage limited resources. Evaluation results on the 2020 census collaboration find that there is strong interest among national and state funders and stakeholders to continue working on census issues, but it is expected that all players will face competing pressures for their time driven by other time-sensitive issues. This puts a premium on the 2020 census collaborative model as interested players may not be able to always attend to all census issues. It also means CEI may need to modify the plan in this document during the ensuing years based on input from stakeholders and funders alike. In short, this plan puts a premium on learning from our 2020 experience, continued collaboration, and ongoing input.

The two main components to the CEI are: (a) Addressing census policy and operations, and (b) Sustaining collaboration and aligned action. Each are described below. The memo concludes with a discussion of CEI governance and the feedback mechanisms that would be incorporated into the initiative.

### ***A. Census Policy and Operations***

Even though work on the 2020 census started in 2016, earlier than ever, many decisions about the census were already locked in or about to be decided. That left little opportunity for a concerted effort to shape congressional and Census Bureau decisions. For example, in response to a draft rule published early in 2016 – the 2020 Census Residence Rule – that would continue prison gerrymandering, census stakeholders, such as Prison Policy Initiative, Vera Institute and Demos, organized a campaign to respond to the rule.

The goal was to end the practice of prison gerrymandering; that is, including prisoners in the census where they are imprisoned rather than where they lived before incarceration. This practice transfers the voting power of millions of mostly urban Black and Brown people to overwhelmingly White and rural districts, altering the political power of communities where people of color live when district lines are drawn.

Stakeholders lost that fight, but there is growing state and local interest and it will be a key issue again for the 2030 census. We don't know if we had started earlier whether the outcome would have been different, but certainly our chances would have been better. That same conclusion might apply to other policy decisions stakeholders almost won, including adding a MENA question, improving questions on race and Hispanic origin, and adding questions on gender identity to the American Community Survey (ACS) and more which were thwarted with the change of administrations in 2017. Children's advocates successfully pushed for late research and attention to the undercount of young children for the 2020 census, but sustained investment may be needed. Moreover, many of these issues will also emerge in debates over questions asked on the American Community Survey. Thus, sustaining connections and discussions with the Census Bureau staff will be critical over the next several years.

There may also be a major challenge to the basic design of the 2030 census and other surveys. A number of leading voices in the census community believe that the current model – ask every household in the country to fill out a form – is no longer viable, and that the Census Bureau needs to make much more extensive use of Administrative Records (AdRex). This would raise concerns that AdRex 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 acknowledge the current model may no longer be viable.

It may be necessary for key census stakeholders to discuss how and when AdRex should be used and when AdRex does not work, building on earlier research and convenings led by census leaders. If a consensus can be built, then that may turn into a campaign to try to shape how the Census Bureau and Congress approaches the issue.

We know that discussions in Congress about Census Bureau funding and allocations for the 2030 census have already begun. Allocations for the ACS is ongoing, and advocacy may be needed for sufficient funding to expand the samples used to survey the historically undercounted to address potential problems with the 2020 census.

We also know it will be important to continue working with the congressional oversight committees to keep a close eye on the Census Bureau's preparations for the decennial census and the ACS. This will also be important as we can expect legislative proposals that will harm census operations over the next few years. 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 moving the race and ethnicity question from the decennial questionnaire. We can also expect proposals to weaken the American Community Survey 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 possible opportunities to compensate for likely flaws in the 2020 count, not to mention the potential impact of the Census Bureau's application of its new Disclosure Avoidance System.

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.

We already know that the census community's technical expert on census, Terri Ann Lowenthal, is seeking to fully retire and will not be playing that role again for the 2030 census and in the crucial planning years now ahead of us. We believe the staff at Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality are able to pick up some portion of the role that Terri Ann played – they proved to be major assets during the 2020 census. For example, they have been tracking the technical details of the new Disclosure Avoidance System and assisting minority groups to make the case for various changes. As we move towards the 2030 census, there will be numerous technical issues similar to the DAS issue; for instance, how administrative records will be used and the role of technology in distributing and analyzing the census. Collectively, we will still need to address how to replace Terri Ann's vast congressional history and experiences.

Nearly everyone interviewed about this plan raised the importance of the ACS, and most believe that philanthropy and stakeholders outside of the core groups have very limited knowledge about the role of the ACS. Some who were interviewed emphasized the need for more accurate ACS data; others surfaced the need to get more precise information about historically undercounted populations; others worried about various technical issues about the survey. A key reason people prioritized the ACS is because the data has significant influence over funding formulas and business decisions. Child poverty data, for example, which drives the allocation of federal funds derives from the ACS. The Bureau's new privacy policies are slated to cover the ACS and there is concern that if the policies strike the wrong balance, it could negatively influence data quality and funding formulas.

Finally, even though the focus of the Census Equity Initiative would be on the ACS and the 2030 decennial, we can expect census data quality issues related to the 2020 census to continue. While the core of the Census Quality Reinforcement efforts has been funded through 2022, it is almost certain some additional work will still need to be funded to address data quality.

The Census Equity Initiative would provide support to organizations that can address the types of issues discussed above as well as respond to emerging issues not discussed above. The organizations would also need to agree to inform other census advocates at the national and state levels when needed and help them engage if required. However, there will not be enough funds to support all the groups who need to be funded, and there will likely not be enough money to fully fund the organizations that are supported. We expect about \$1.4 to \$1.5 million per year will be available for this policy work. Given the limited funds, we expect most of the organizations would receive around \$100,000 per year from CEI (but can try to raise additional resources from other funders).

At this point, we envision at least the following organizations might be funded for each of the four years (in alphabetical order):

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Census Black Roundtable (at National Urban League)  
Census Project  
Georgetown Center on Poverty & Inequality  
NALEO Educational Fund

National Congress of American Indians  
Partnership for America's Children  
The Leadership Conference Education Fund

In addition, other organizations would be supported for project specific expertise needed at that moment in time. There also may be a need to support research experts to analyze the 2020 data and provide tools to help national and state groups promote the census. Some people interviewed wondered whether a census “score card” or other materials could be developed to show how communities have been affected by the census count through, for example, specific resource allocations and/or policy decisions.

### ***B. Census Collaboration and Aligned Action***

A top priority voiced by local, state and national census stakeholders and funders is to not let the census “collaborative” dissipate. (See Attachment B for summary of recommendations developed during a December 9, 2020 census quarterly meeting of stakeholders and funders.) “Collaborative” seems to refer to the investment made in strengthening communications and aligning actions among stakeholders and funders across those working at the local, state and national levels.

Two-thirds of funders responding to a survey evaluating the 2020 census campaign felt that there was greater civic engagement in the state and the infrastructure was strengthened because of census work. They did not want that momentum to disappear. This was echoed by stakeholders.

To support sustained collaboration and aligned action, the Census Equity Initiative would focus on four types of activities:

1. **Renew the Census Equity Fund (CEF).** 50 out of 51 state groups said it was “very important” to continue the Census Equity Fund (and the other group said it was “somewhat important”). There was also keen interest among funders. Accordingly, we would revive the CEF with approximately \$1.2 million in annual grantmaking. If there were one grant per prioritized state (assuming 16 states) that would be an average of \$75,000 per year. CEI will still need to establish criteria for state selection and size of grants with an understanding of the \$1.2 million per year limit.

Initial thinking is that CEF grantees could use funds to address one or more of the following:

- Assist with issues emerging through the items identified under the census policy and operations section (above). This might involve research, communications, submitting comments to the Census Bureau, weighing in with policymakers at the state and federal levels or taking other actions to improve census data about historically undercounted populations. While this participation might be episodic, there could also be support for specific campaigns such as actions to stop prison gerrymandering, add questions to the ACS or decennial census, or address the AdRex issues that may emerge.
- Highlight the importance of the decennial census and ACS. Since the census is a once a decade exercise, the public, trusted community voices, and elected

leaders may lose focus during the decade. As a result, highlighting the importance of the census, including the ACS, needs to be rebuilt each decade. There may be activities that CEF grantees can undertake to regularly spotlight the importance of the ACS and decennial census data for community resources and decision-making so that relevance and saliency doesn't need to be rebuilt each decade. This includes sharing with state and local government officials, community members, service providers, business leaders and others data on the impact of an accurate census count on resources for their state or region.

- Develop a plan for reaching historically undercounted populations in the next decennial census. While the 2020 census faced unprecedented challenges, we know that certain populations are undercounted in each decennial census. Informed by 2020 outreach lessons from both their own experiences and those of other state-based groups, CEF grantees might begin building and implementing plans to engage hard to reach populations to keep the census top of mind.
  - Leverage state and local funding for the census. This is primarily aimed at encouraging philanthropic institutions to continue supporting work on census activities within the state. Some CEF grantees also might advocate for state or local government funding to continue educating the public about the importance of the ACS and decennial census.
2. **Continue philanthropic outreach.** The early grants during the 2020 census campaign for outreach to and education of institutional funders proved to be a smart investment. We have heard from philanthropic leaders about the importance of this educational outreach; in many cases, it made it easier for the Census Subgroup to ask foundations to give money to the census collaborative and it encouraged state funders to support census activities within states. This type of grantmaking helps build trust among funders and by presenting the CEI plan will give a common agenda to pursue. It will also be important to do this work since people move in and out of philanthropy and staff who may have gained knowledge about the census may no longer be at a particular foundation. Investing in outreach to and education of the philanthropic community about census issues, including the American Community Survey, should continue. Funder briefing materials and webinars about the ACS will need to be developed to help funders understand how the ACS links to the various issues covered in their missions.
3. **Support census coordination/communication mechanisms.** It is vitally important that effective communication channels are available so that those involved in CEI can share information, thereby reducing unnecessary duplication. Such communications channels need to feature the ability to distribute information widely and quickly when immediate action is needed. Additionally, if messaging is needed, there will be a need to frame the message for others working on census.

The Census Counts operation, co-chaired by the Leadership Conference Education Fund, NALEO Educational Fund, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, was a sophisticated campaign that coordinated messages and actions on the 2020 census and provided education and outreach to engage a wide diversity of additional national groups, as well as their local networks. Its website was widely used. Additionally, The Leadership Conference and State Voices co-convened the State Census Action Network (S-CAN), which was a communications system reaching national, state, and local

census groups (including the Census Equity Fund grantees). Can these types of infrastructure be reprised for CEI? If possible, we think modest added support will be worth it. If not, resources should be reserved for developing a communications channel for those involved in CEI.

Additionally, these leadership groups and others reached out to various key census constituencies, such as the business community, libraries, disability groups, and other historically undercounted populations. It is worth considering whether resources should be added to support such outreach earlier in the decade or begin to phase in outreach to these constituencies by mid-decade?

#### 4. **Support information sharing and field learning.**

- **Host 1-3 meetings a year.** The census quarterly meetings related to the 2020 census campaign became a vehicle for strengthening the census collaborative; it provided an opportunity for stakeholders to talk with one another, for funders to do the same, and for stakeholder-funder interactions. In addition, we were able to engage representatives from state and local government associations, such as the National League of Cities and National Conference of State Legislatures, who then reached out to their networks with census information. These meetings also were a vehicle to share information, modify strategies, and discuss problems associated with the 2020 census. Two-thirds of funders surveyed felt these meetings should continue as did a majority of the stakeholders. Accordingly, we envision these meetings continuing. Depending on need and desire we can do between one and three meetings each year. For 2021, there would be one virtual meeting.

We can also consider whether to host or co-host webinars on various census subjects. If the past is also prelude, the CEI grantees (e.g., Funder Census Initiative, The Leadership Conference) will want to host their own events, but they may want us to co-host to encourage participation.

- **Support assistance to state and local census coalitions.** One post-census approach to maintaining the census networking, Census Legacies, is led by Karthick Ramakrishnan of University of California at Riverside. Census Legacies envisions providing technical assistance and peer learning opportunities to state and local census tables. Its plans are contingent on these tables identifying other resources to continue their work. Providing a modest grant to Census Legacies could shore up the capacity of census collaborations and help align Census Legacies' efforts with those of the CEI. (If other projects emerge to assist state and local census tables, CEI would also consider supporting that work.) Census Legacies has submitted a multi-year, multi-million dollar proposal to a foundation on behalf of itself and four national organizations. If this grant is secured, we would recalibrate the distribution of CEI resources so as to not duplicate the funding through the Census Legacies proposal.

#### **Feedback on CEI**

CEI expects through its grantmaking to improve census operations and products when it comes to historically undercounted populations. Additionally, CEI will strive for transparency and open communication with census stakeholders and funders about implementation of this plan and its

related grantmaking. CEI will establish an assessment process to cover these topics – openness and addressing undercounted populations. The goal of this assessment is primarily to create a feedback loop for improving the way CEI, stakeholders and funders operate rather than as an evaluation of any particular organization or campaign.

## **CEI Governance**

CEI governance would continue as it has during the 2020 census campaign with the Census Subgroup serving as a steering committee for the funder collaborative. The Census Subgroup, which will change its name to CEI Steering Committee, is comprised of Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bauman Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, Joyce Foundation, JPB Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Unbound Philanthropy, Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation. During 2021, the Steering Committee will assess whether there should be any changes to the composition and governing rules of the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee will be responsible for:

1. Setting the overall direction and priorities for the CEI;
2. Making decisions about allocation of funds from the pooled fund;
3. Promoting work undertaken through CEI; and
4. Assisting with fundraising to fulfill the commitments in this plan.

The Steering Committee will operate through committees, as needed. For example, a committee will be formed to develop recommended criteria or guidelines for grantmaking through the Census Equity Fund along with whether there will be an RFP or whether proposals will be selectively solicited. The Census Equity Fund committee will also recommend grants through the Fund for the Steering Committee to consider.

Gary Bass would continue to chair the CEI Steering Committee and Karen Narasaki and Amy Dominguez-Arms would continue to staff the Census Equity Initiative.

Funders would continue to have the choice of providing grants directly to the organization/project identified in this plan or providing a grant to the pooled fund at New Venture Fund or both.

**To Discuss this Census Equity Initiative**, please contact any of the below people:

Gary Bass at [gbass@baumanfoundation.org](mailto:gbass@baumanfoundation.org)  
Karen Narasaki at [karen@narasakijustice.com](mailto:karen@narasakijustice.com)  
Amy Dominguez-Arms at [amydarms@gmail.com](mailto:amydarms@gmail.com)

## **Attachment A. People Interviewed About CEI**

### **Organization**

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Census Project  
Communities Foundation of Texas  
Fair Count  
Florida Rising  
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation/FCCI  
Georgetown Center on Poverty & Inequality  
Long Island Community Foundation  
Michigan Nonprofit Association  
NALEO Educational Fund  
National Urban Indian Family Coalition  
National Urban League (Census Black Roundtable)  
New York Community Trust  
One Arizona  
Partnership for America's Children  
Philanthropy Northwest  
State Voices  
The Leadership Conference Education Fund  
Thornburg Foundation  
United Philanthropy Forum

### **People Interviewed**

John Yang & Terry Ao Minnis  
Howard Fienberg, Mary Jo Hoeksema & Steve Jost  
Amy Deslar  
Rebecca DeHart  
Andrea Mercado & Moné Holder  
Jocelyn Bissonnette  
Indivar Dutta-Gupta, Carla Brumfield & Ja June Lee  
Sol Marie Alfonso Jones  
Joan Gustafson  
Arturo Vargas  
Janeen Comenote  
Marc Moriel, Jerika Richardson & Jeri Green  
Patricia Swann  
Montserrat Arredondo  
Deborah Stein  
Meredith Higashi  
Alexis Anderson-Reed & Elena Langworthy  
Corrine Yu, Sonum Nerurkar, Anita Banerji & Meeta Anand  
Allan Oliver  
David Biemesderfer & Matthew Evans

**Attachment B. Results from Dec. 9, 2020 Census Meeting on Future of Collaborative**

CENSUS QUARTERLY MEETING | DEC. 9, 2020

## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Funders Census Initiative 2020

Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THIS COLLABORATIVE  
+ OUR WORK AROUND THE CENSUS?

- 01 Start planning for 2030**  
Start planning for the 2030 Census through proactive outreach, planning logistics around digital divide, and addressing disinformation by having conversations with social media platforms. Keep forward momentum going through redistricting and next census. Build in anticipation for new administrations and natural disasters.



- 02 Celebrate link between resources + count**  
Make impact of census tangible by drawing public attention to when funding shows up in communities. Embed ongoing awareness of census impact in communities least likely to participate. Prioritize publicizing what people do with census data and how numbers are used to drive decisions in states and localities.



- 03 Preserve institutional knowledge + communication**  
Transfer knowledge of census experts within the foundation world in the face of turnover and changing roles. Have regular conferences and webinars each year. Network, collaborate, and share expertise. This year was much more accessible because we did so much by video; meeting in person just because we can is not necessarily an improvement. Record and archive our history for 2030 and beyond.



- 04 Transfer energy+ tactics to related issue areas**  
Shift focus from census to civic engagement and organizing work. Many partners remain constant. Apply census strategies to fair redistricting, attention to prison and judicial gerrymandering, voting and elections, food distribution, and vaccine education.

- 05 Cultivate relationships + trust with Census Bureau**  
Assess 2020 Census hires at the Bureau. How do we hold the agency accountable? Encourage increased transparency from the Bureau. Encourage their early engagement with both states and philanthropy.



## CENSUS QUARTERLY MEETING | DEC. 9, 2020



06

### Maintain partnerships

Remain together as a collaborative with meetings throughout the year. Strengthen and expand coalitions. Build on trusted relationships, especially with historically undercounted and underrepresented communities. Focus on ground-up advocacy and relational organizing and keep up with tactical changes. Listen to people.

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07

### Promote census data usage

Make data available for small communities while protecting privacy. Develop more accessible and user/community-friendly data tools. Train nonprofits and everyday people how to access and use census data on a day-to-day basis.

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08

### Finish 2020 Census

See 2020 census through. Continue monitoring data quality issues as well as legal challenges. Follow what cities and localities are doing. How do we want to engage leaders and organizations on how to use the data? Prepare for data disputes.

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09

### Identify who we missed in the count this year

There were many people who we anticipate were not reached or counted in 2020, due to the digital divide, fear, inaccessibility, COVID and natural disasters, etc. We must identify and reach them moving forward.

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10

### Develop communications strategies

Expand conversations around effective redistricting outreach messaging. Allow local and regional groups to learn from national messaging and vice versa. Continue to develop language around democracy and race equity. Small investments in advertising made a huge difference.

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11

### Attend to policy and research

Align policy agendas. Be on the lookout for census legislation and advocacy well ahead of 2030. Important to educate elected leaders and the broader community early. Develop infrastructure for policy research collaboration and work with the Census Bureau research team.

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