



# Together We Count

Assessing Efforts to Support a  
Fair and Accurate 2020 Census



BARSOUM POLICY  
CONSULTING

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# INTRODUCTION

Every 10 years, the government is constitutionally mandated to conduct a count of the population to ensure equal representation in Congress. “Census data is used to craft policies, plan initiatives, deliver services, and promote economic development.

The census is crucial to:

- The distribution of over \$1.5 trillion in federal funds each year<sup>1</sup>;
- Determining service delivery needs at the federal, state, and local level, and planning for schools, health care centers, libraries and senior centers;
- Guiding business decisions, such as where to break ground, whom to hire, and how to attract customers;
- The reapportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and electoral college votes;
- Designing local, state, and congressional political districts;
- Research on social and economic issues; and
- The implementation, monitoring and enforcement of civil rights laws in areas such as education, housing, the environment, workplace, and criminal justice.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Counting for Dollars 2020: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds. Andrew Reamer. The George Washington University, 2020. [Counting for Dollars 2020: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds | GW Institute of Public Policy | The George Washington University \(gwu.edu\)](https://www.gwu.edu/~publicpolicy/counting-for-dollars-2020)

<sup>2</sup> Census Collaborative Fund Overview. Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup, 2019.

**While one could think of the census as a technical or bureaucratic activity, the census is actually about power and resources.**

The Census Bureau recognizes that “[c]ensuses are not conducted in a vacuum. They occur amidst internal and external crisis, shifts in cultural interests, and events that become ‘defining moments’ for each generation. Census data reflect the growth of the population as well as the changing values and interests of the American people.”<sup>3</sup> The 2020 Census faced the unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic, resulting in a myriad of changes and delays with the census timeline and data collection period. The count was further complicated by a broad array of events during the active data collection period, from April 1 to October 15, 2020, including racial justice uprisings, wildfires, and hurricanes. Additionally, it was politicized by a federal administration that initiated harsh anti-immigrant policies, deepening further distrust of government, especially among communities of color. This politicization was reflected in attempts to include a citizenship question that was successfully challenged in the Supreme Court; last minute placement of additional political appointees within the Census Bureau; and presidential actions seeking to exclude undocumented immigrants from apportionment calculations and noncitizens from redistricting files sent to states, resulting in numerous lawsuits and adding chaos to the census timeline and data collection period.

The census also faced a number of other structural headwinds: early congressional underfunding and late appropriations, leading to delayed research and cutbacks to planned census dress rehearsals; a temporary lack of a permanent Census Bureau director; the transition from paper-based to largely online data collection; difficulties hiring enumerators; general falloff in survey participation; and more.

Recognizing the importance of a fair and accurate count and building on learnings from the 2010 Census, philanthropic work to support the 2020 Census began in 2015, with a number of foundations coming together to develop an approach targeting historically undercounted populations. This work would allow more funders to support the census through information sharing, collaboration around a single strategy, and streamlined aggregation and allocation of resources through pooled funds and aligned grantmaking strategies. These funders, meeting under the banner of the Democracy Funders Collaborative, formed a Census Subgroup (the Subgroup) to tackle the work. What resulted was a multi-year national initiative that brought together a diverse array of national, regional, and local funders and census stakeholders. The initiative was extraordinary in terms of the number and diversity of stakeholders, the multi-pronged strategy, the resources raised, and the shared commitment to a fair and accurate census count.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Fast facts*.  
[https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/fast\\_facts/](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/)

The Subgroup funded ORS Impact and Barsoum Policy Consulting to conduct an independent assessment of key components of the census Collaborative. The Collaborative refers to the group of funders, nonprofits, consultants, and allies that coalesced around this strategy to support the 2020 Census. This evaluation was conducted from 2018 through early 2021, with interim findings shared in late 2018 and 2019. Like the rest of the census, the evaluation was extended, and our data focus on the efforts to build up the census infrastructure through the end of the census data collection period on October 15, 2020.

This report has two key audiences and purposes. First, we reflect on the impact of the implemented strategy with an independent view on successes, challenges, and lessons learned for those who were more closely involved in 2020 Census work, including the funders and grantees. Second, we hope to memorialize this work for on-going and future efforts so that lessons learned and gains made can be used to strengthen future efforts. Given the breadth and depth of work, this report cannot and will not capture every lesson or detail of the work. Rather, we seek to take a broader view of the strategy undertaken. Other products add to the picture of the work of this period, including other research products, reports, and exit memos from key staff. While we hope fervently that global pandemics don't become a regular event and that racial justice and climate change issues (e.g., wildfires, hurricanes) that emerged during the enumeration period are addressed in the intervening decade, we also cannot ignore the context within which this particular census occurred. We hope with this report to lift up lessons that may hold true in the future.

This evaluation is not intended to evaluate any organization or set of organizations involved in the Collaborative. Rather, the focus is looking at overall strategies and tactics used during the 2020 Census campaign. This evaluation also does not assess the effectiveness of the strategy based on census response rates. There are numerous external factors that influence census response rates across regions or in the country overall. Rather, this evaluation seeks to illuminate the degree to which the array of goals, activities, and tactics worked as intended; were able to respond to the changing conditions that occurred throughout this period; and worked to support a fair and accurate count.

### **A note on terminology**

**Historically Undercounted Populations:** The Census Bureau has historically used the term “hard to count” to describe individuals and communities it deems difficult to reach. This term removes the burden from the Census Bureau and places blame on the community. As part of our asset-based and equitable evaluation approach, we have shifted our terminology to align with stakeholders and use the term “historically undercounted populations.” This terminology shifts the burden from communities to the systems currently in place that are inadequately reaching these communities. Historically undercounted populations include different racial/ethnic groups, young children under five, and immigrants, among others.



# Summary of Findings

## OVERARCHING FINDINGS

- At the highest level, we think the overall approach to working towards a fair and accurate census was sound and effective. While there are always lessons to learn and tweaks that could have been made, the ethos and approaches taken resulted in a strong response in a particularly challenging time.
- The overall strategy of building and supporting a diverse network of stakeholders over time allowed for broad mobilization, effective exchange and adaptation, a network effect beyond those directly involved, and combinations of capacities toward the shared goal of a quality census.
- The ability to embrace an emergent approach and lean into adaptation and responsive pivoting served the strategy well.

### NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### STATE / LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

### FUNDER ENGAGEMENT

- A network of national hub organizations was formed around the 2020 Census, which helped them leverage each other's expertise, skills, and resources in support of the census and ultimately helped them to respond and adapt to emerging challenges.
- The hub network effectively connected national, state, and local organizations on the census and to a range of critical census resources that supported their GOTC work. The two-way relationships between national hubs and their affiliates allowed these organizations to mutually inform each other's census work and rapidly respond and modify strategies.
- The pandemic forced an increased reliance on technology and social media strategies among the hub network, which resulted in increased social media capacity and innovation with affiliates on the ground. It also led to greater use of local media, ad and mail campaigns, and distribution of materials.
- The citizenship question and the social uprisings in response to the George Floyd murder created challenges for the census but were also opportunities for power building for some national hubs and their constituencies.
- The Census Counts Campaign played a critical role as the hub of hubs but also as an overarching campaign lead that centralized resources and information and enabled rapid response.
- The availability of centralized research, analysis, and technical expert support informed and strengthened census activities throughout all phases of the census.

NATIONAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

STATE / LOCAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY  
IMPROVEMENTS

FUNDER  
ENGAGEMENT

- The Collaborative strengthened the local and state civic engagement infrastructure for GOTC work; through the national hub network and other centralized opportunities, it provided resources, materials, and guidance and facilitated tables for strategy development and collaboration.
- CEF grantees and other local organizations connected to the national census infrastructure by partnering with national hubs and worked with local and state organizations that were also supported by the Collaborative.
- CEF grantees and other local organizations leveraged and built expertise where necessary, and the Collaborative helped strengthen existing partnerships and create new ones.
- COVID-19 was the biggest challenge faced by CEF grantees and other local census advocates. The Collaborative’s support helped organizations pivot their strategies to respond to these challenges.

NATIONAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

STATE / LOCAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY  
IMPROVEMENTS

FUNDER  
ENGAGEMENT

- A core group of national organizations led the census advocacy; their existing relationships, coalitions, and tables formed the basis of their collaboration and contributed to their success.
- Reaching across the aisle to Republican legislative leaders and working with the business sector were important to the success of the advocacy strategy.
- Inside–outside strategies were made possible because of the presence of both a core groups of census experts and advocates and the networks of state and local organizations that could be mobilized to demonstrate power and influence.
- The 2020 Census increased advocacy capacity and the base of support for the census that will be used now and into the future.

NATIONAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

STATE / LOCAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY  
IMPROVEMENTS

FUNDER  
ENGAGEMENT

- The Collaborative enabled and facilitated funders’ engagement and successfully expanded the number of funders and the resources raised to support the 2020 Census; FCI played a key role in enabling funder participation.

- In addition to providing funding, funders leveraged their influence to support the census.
- The Collaborative facilitated and enabled funder engagement by designing different ways to participate and providing on-going support to build census-specific knowledge and skills.
- There is energy and interest for continued funder engagement, and funders’ interests related to the 2030 Census require very early, if not on-going engagement.

## LEGACY / POST-GOTC

- The 2020 Census was more than a campaign; it was a catalyst for understanding the foundational role of the census in democracy and power for historically undercounted populations. This awareness fuels the commitment of organization to continue working on census and related efforts.
- Data suggest that the partnerships created by national, state, and local organizations were not merely transactional for the purposes of improving the 2020 Census count, but rather the infrastructure developed was expected to have a life for other kinds of civic engagement efforts and has implications for the sustainability of a longer-term infrastructure.

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report is organized into three main sections:

<i>Section</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>What to Expect</i>
<b>Background Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the 2020 Census Collaborative</li> <li>• About this Evaluation</li> </ul>	Rich description about the initiative, its history, and progression over time, as well as information about what to expect from the evaluation.
<b>Evaluation Findings by Area of Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Infrastructure</li> <li>• State and Local Infrastructure</li> <li>• Digital Support for GOTC</li> <li>• Policy Improvements</li> <li>• Funder Engagement in the 2020 Census</li> <li>• Cross-Cutting Findings</li> </ul>	Evaluative assessments by ORS Impact and Barsoum Consulting on the outcomes and lessons learned gleaned from across data sources.
<b>Concluding Thoughts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluator Reflections</li> <li>• Conclusion</li> </ul>	Considerations for future thinking and efforts.



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## About the 2020 Census Collaborative

This section provides helpful contextual information about the “how” of the Census Collaborative: how the work began, how fundraising happened, and who the key players and structures were and how they developed over time. This represents information shared by key staff to provide documentation for the future as well as context for the evaluation findings that follow. The evaluators did not independently verify these facts, though most align with data that were collected.

### HOW THE FUNDER CENSUS CAMPAIGN STARTED

Ahead of the 2010 Census, foundations supported a 2010 Census outreach campaign, providing grants for educational and outreach activities aimed at mobilizing people in underserved communities to answer the decennial census. This financial investment supported activities ranging from research and analysis to national public education campaigns and grassroots campaigns aimed at bringing census messages to people where they live and work.<sup>4</sup> While the 2010 Census was considered the most accurate census in U.S. history, there was still a significant disparity in the count of many communities, including historically undercounted people of color, immigrants, people with low income, Native Americans living on reservations, and young children under the age of five.

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<sup>4</sup> Lowenthal, Terri Ann. Supporting and Accurate 2010 Census In Hard-To-Count Communities. Funders Census Initiative. March 2011 [https://funderscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FCI\\_Best\\_Practices\\_Lessons\\_Learned\\_by\\_Terri\\_Ann\\_Lowenthal.pdf](https://funderscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FCI_Best_Practices_Lessons_Learned_by_Terri_Ann_Lowenthal.pdf)

By 2015, concerns were emerging about plans for the 2020 Census. Congress was insisting that the Census Bureau spend less preparing for and conducting the 2020 Census than it did on the 2010 Census, even though the U.S. population was expected to grow. Budget shortfalls had already delayed or cancelled field tests of the census. The Bureau's plan to adopt new information technologies raised technical concerns as well as concerns that it would expand the digital divide and might exacerbate undercounts of historically undercounted populations. Adding to this uncertainty, the Census Bureau was exploring significant changes in the way it asks about race and ethnicity, including ways of making use of administrative data from federal programs and other sources that were known to be of poor quality on race and ethnicity. Finally, there was continuing discussions in Congress about adding a question on immigration status to the census questionnaire.

Meanwhile, the American Community Survey (ACS), which in the 2000s replaced the "long form" census and is used to determine the distribution of federal funds for many programs and much more, was under assault. Some members of Congress added riders that would effectively make response to the ACS voluntary. They also voted for steep cuts to the ACS budget—20 percent below current-year funding—that could force the Census Bureau to cut the ACS sample size, essentially resulting in the same quality of data as converting to a voluntary survey.

It was in this context, in January 2015, that the funders involved in the Democracy Funders Collaborative recognized the considerable challenges facing the 2020 Census and the significant and fundamental importance of the census to foundations' missions, as well as their grantees' missions. They asked Gary Bass of the Bauman Foundation, a member of the Democracy Funders Collaborative, to develop a plan for philanthropy to promote a fair and accurate census. Bass interviewed census experts and funders; he and his team reviewed activities from 2010; and by May 2015, he presented a plan to the funders.

That plan started with a focus on the federal policies and resources needed for the 2020 Census and concluded with engaging trusted messengers to encourage historically undercounted populations to fill out the census. The May plan evolved over the year as more funders and stakeholders reviewed it and provided input. By November 2015, the input helped to strengthen the plan, and it was widely supported by funders and stakeholders alike. Bass told the Democracy Funders Collaborative in November, *"Foundations have the chance to be a key catalyst in protecting one of the most critical tools of democracy. With the 2020 census only five years away, the time is now to take action to set the right course."*<sup>5</sup> They agreed.

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<sup>5</sup> Freedman Consulting and Bauman Foundation on behalf of the Census Working Group. "A Plan for Funders to Ensure Adequate Policies and Resources for the 2020 Census," Memo to Democracy Funders Collaborative, Nov. 3, 2015.

## THE PLAN OF ACTION

A working group of about a dozen funders interested in the census worked with Bass to help refine a plan starting in 2015; their goal was to have a census at least as accurate as 2010, as well as to focus on historically undercounted populations. That group, which grew over time, became known as the Census Subgroup, a subgroup of the Democracy Funders Collaborative. The plan became known as the Plan of Action and guided strategy for the 2020 Census campaign; it was comprehensive yet simple enough to engage funders and provide flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. It focused on three strategies that spanned national- and state-level work, each of which had additional planning documents with further details on the vision for the efforts:<sup>6</sup>

- **Policy improvements:** Advocacy for policy improvements to the ACS and 2020 Census to ensure adequate federal funding and sound strategic decision-making by the federal government.
- **Expanding the base of census stakeholders:** Bringing new voices to the table in support of the census, including private funders, businesses, faith-based groups, government agencies, and local elected officials.
- **Get Out the Count (GOTC):** Public outreach and education focused on historically undercounted populations to promote census participation.

## FUNDRAISING APPROACH

This small group of funders significantly expanded over the next five years through substantial and sustained outreach to and education within the funder community. In September 2018, Ford Foundation’s Darren Walker co-hosted a funder summit with the Bauman Foundation and other leaders of the Subgroup, kicking off a fundraising drive to address the budget gaps to fully implement the Plan of Action. The summit was followed with a May 2019 letter from Walker and three other foundation CEOs—Patrick Gaspard, then of Open Society Foundations, Barbara Picower of The JPB Foundation, and La June Montgomery Tabron of W.K. Kellogg Foundation—encouraging funders to help fill a remaining \$10 million budget gap. Meanwhile, Bass was sending emails to a growing list of about 1,000 funders, keeping them updated on census issues along with the funding situation for implementing the Plan of Action. Other members of the Subgroup, such as Geri Mannion of Carnegie Corporation of New York, were also reaching out to their contacts in the foundation community to discuss the importance of funding this effort. This outreach had to continue

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<sup>6</sup> Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup. (2016). *Ensuring adequate policies and resources for the 2020 Census*.

because external events—from actions taken by the Trump administration to the pandemic—caused the budget needed to implement the Plan of Action to steadily increase.

Foundations were encouraged to participate and contribute through streamlined mechanisms of engagement that included a pooled fund, a state-based CEF, and aligned funding. Aligned funding allowed funders to give directly to an organization that was part of the Plan of Action. Regardless of their census knowledge, experience, or grantmaking capacity, funders could easily contribute to the pooled fund or integrate the census into their own grantmaking. In fact, many funders gave directly to organizations and to the pooled fund. As the pooled fund became more established, it grew in size, allowing for more targeted and nimble funding to fill gaps.

The New Venture Fund provided the home for the pooled fund, which included the CEF, giving the funders the ability to rapidly deploy resources in response to changing circumstances and emergent needs. The Subgroup tracked funding for this national plan so that funders could better assess where funding gaps existed, avoid duplication, and better leverage limited funding for implementing the Plan of Action. One issue identified early in the process was how to track general support grants. The Subgroup concluded that funders should either ask grantees how much of the general support they expected to use for their census work or to establish a percentage to count toward the census. Thus, the Subgroup tracked census funding derived from general support grants based on grantee-identified amounts.

**Figure 1 | Summary of the Collaborative’s Members, Resources Raised, and Reach<sup>7</sup>**



<sup>7</sup> The Collaborative directly supported state-based organizations’ GOTC efforts in these locations through the Census Equity Fund but indirectly contributed to GOTC efforts across the country.

This funding strategy to tackle the Plan of Action was reinforced with funding provided by local, state, and national funders for census outreach within states. Philanthropic engagement throughout the country provided funding and other supports such as convenings, development of materials, and communications efforts.

This approach resulted in a large pool of funders and resources and created a funder collaborative much larger in scope, scale, and resources than for past censuses (see Figure 1). Overall, at least \$117 million were raised to support the Plan of Action, far surpassing the original goal of \$29.7 million, estimated in 2015.<sup>8</sup> At least 126 funders provided support, meaning that no one foundation or group of foundations dominated the funding, and it is important to note that the budget grew over time as a function of the fundraising success. And this is not the total philanthropic investment; across states, philanthropy also augmented public funding to support state-based activities.<sup>9</sup>

## THE KEY PLAYERS AND STRUCTURES

Not surprisingly, there were many actors and structures needed to shepherd, lead, and maintain this large-scale effort. Some players returned from prior census experience; other partners and groups were engaged strategically and opportunistically over time. This section summarized the main players and structures that supported the Collaborative's work.

### The Subgroup

As the cadre of funders expanded, the coordination of these funders was spearheaded by Bass and the Bauman Foundation staff and later joined by several key players, including Karen Narasaki, the former executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, who led national Asian American and Pacific Islander census outreach in 2000 and 2010; Cathy Duvall, who was working on redistricting issues and had just left a leadership position at the Sierra Club; and Amy Dominguez-Arms, who formerly worked for The James Irvine Foundation and was involved in redistricting and census issues in California. The Subgroup remained active as the steering committee involved in setting and approving the funder strategy over time.

The Subgroup met monthly throughout the census campaign, starting in early 2015. Each member actively helped to steer the funder strategy and oversee what should be funded through the pooled fund. They also helped with outreach to potential donors, assisted with

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<sup>8</sup> Our data shows that at least \$117 million were raised, but this figure does not include funding from state or local funders, and it might include all direct grants national foundations provided to support the census.

<sup>9</sup> ORS Impact produced a separate report describing how funders and organizations in each of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico worked to support the 2020 Census. This report contains an overall estimate of the total amount of private and public funding available in aggregate and per state. The report is available to the public in the FCI website: <https://funderscommittee.org/learning-evaluations/>

developing and implementing the Plan of Action, and helped to promote the importance of a fair and accurate census. When needed, the Subgroup established committees, sometimes comprised of funders only and at other times including stakeholders. For example, the Evaluation and Communication Committees, chaired by The JPB Foundation and Joyce Foundation, respectively, included both funders and stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> Some committees were task oriented and dissolved when the task was accomplished. For example, the Ford Foundation chaired a Business Outreach Task Force to develop a request for proposals and recommend one or more lead grantees to encourage business participation in the census. On the other hand, at least one committee, the Census Digital Organizing Group (C-DOG), chaired by the Resilient Democracy Fund, will continue beyond this census initiative, renamed as Civic Digital Organizing Group.

## Quarterly Meetings

The Subgroup also held in-person quarterly meetings, starting in January 2016. These meetings involved key census stakeholders and funders and often had the Census Bureau as guests. Towards the end of 2016, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation's (FCCP) Funders Census Initiative (FCI) joined in cohosting these quarterly meetings. Over time, these quarterly meetings grew to more than 150 people and included national, state, and local funders; nonprofits; and technical experts. These meetings provided a place to discuss strategy, identify challenges and successes, and share updated information and ideas. They also symbolized what became known as "the Collaborative," where funders and stakeholders were working together to promote a fair and accurate census.

During some of the early quarterly meetings, national stakeholders and funders began discussing implementation of the Plan of Action. One priority was to better understand how to talk about the census with the public. With support through the pooled fund, the Census Project commissioned Lake Research Partners to conduct three focus groups in September 2016, followed by a national survey. It was through this work that the Collaborative embraced the language of a "fair and accurate census."

Another priority was identifying top constituencies to engage in the census. One category emphasized engaging state and local organizations in the policy work and identifying which states to prioritize with funding. After agreeing on a handful of priority states, the Bauman Foundation and Ford Foundation organized a meeting of 40 people representing organizations from different states, national organizations with field presence, census technical experts, and funders in October 2016 to discuss field activities. The meeting resulted in The Leadership Conference agreeing to regularly convene this group, which dubbed itself the "Kitchen Cabinet," to establish a communication vehicle with stakeholders in the field.

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<sup>10</sup> The Communications Committee was cochaired by The Leadership Conference.

After the 2016 election, the stakeholders and funders examined the durability of the Plan of Action and concluded it still worked but that some of the implementation approaches needed adjustments. For example, the importance of engaging businesses, organizations representing state and local governments, and conservatives was elevated—and plans for such outreach was initiated.

## **Funder Outreach: FCCP/FCI and United Philanthropy Forum**

The Subgroup made an intentional decision not to brand itself or become the face of the census effort. It made plans to disband upon completion of the census and decided to have funder outreach live in an organization with institutional longevity. The Subgroup decided in 2016 to support FCI (housed at FCCP) and for United Philanthropy Forum (The Forum) to be the main vehicles for philanthropic outreach and education. Many of the Subgroup materials are memorialized on the FCI website. Under Jocelyn Bissonnette’s leadership, the FCI served as a vehicle for philanthropic stakeholders to get information about the 2020 Census, including tools to assist them, hosting regular meetings and a listserv to keep funders informed.

## **Census Experts**

There was also a team of census experts supported to help stakeholders and funders with their census work. For example, Terri Ann Lowenthal, with her extensive knowledge on the topic, her intimate understanding of the Census Bureau, and her background in directing a congressional committee that had census oversight, served as the primary expert on nearly all census matters. Andrew Reamer of George Washington University worked with Sean Moulton at the Project On Government Oversight to produce briefs identifying 316 federal programs explaining how the census was connected directly and indirectly to the distribution of trillions of federal funding. The briefs provided information by state and in some cases by county. Steven Romalewski of CUNY Graduate Center provided interactive “Hard to Count” maps, tracked data on census self-response, and advised groups on interpreting data about census data collection. William O’Hare, a demographer, provided expert advice on Census Bureau operations and analysis of undercounts, particularly as it concerned young children. Indivar Dutta-Gupta and his team at Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality provided technical analysis on a variety of census issues, from the dress rehearsal in Providence, Rhode Island, to the differential privacy policy being developed by the Census Bureau. Groups such as the Brennan Center for Justice coordinated amicus briefs. Some experts also became witnesses in court proceedings. The information developed by these experts was critical to educating and engaging policymakers, funders, community-based organizations, and the media.

## Census Counts Campaign

Some of the key stakeholders from the 2010 Census were eager to get started on the 2020 cycle and were excited about earlier funding than in the 2010 cycle. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights was such an organization. The Leadership Conference operates a Census Task Force cochaired by Arturo Vargas of NALEO Educational Fund and John Yang of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC. The three organizations provided significant input on the Plan of Action and, with initial funding, moved quickly on a range of policy issues. A top issue concerned what type of coalition structure made sense for the stakeholders and how the Subgroup would interact with that structure. There was agreement that The Leadership Conference, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, and NALEO Educational Fund should cochair a structure that would be called Census Counts. Less certain was whether there should be other cochairs, such as someone from the business community or a former government or elected official. In the end, Vanita Gupta from The Leadership Conference, Vargas, and Yang remained cochairs of Census Counts. Each brought unique talent to the endeavor. Vargas had led Hispanic outreach on three prior censuses and was serving on the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee. Yang had worked as a political appointee in the Obama Commerce Department, the department overseeing the census. Gupta had just left the civil rights division of the Justice Department and had intimate knowledge of the importance of census data. Gupta also brought a campaign organizing perspective to the census work.

Under Beth Lynk's leadership, the Census Counts Campaign served as the central place for coordination, message development, and rapid response. Funder support that had already been in place to support Census Counts, as well as national organizations and technical experts for research and legal coordination, created readiness for responding to the citizenship question.

## National Hubs

While working on the policy issues extended beyond the timeframe envisioned in the Plan of Action, planning for the GOTC effort needed to start. Karen Narasaki was tasked with working with the Collaborative to develop a GOTC plan. That plan was agreed upon by early 2018, even though some work had already started in 2017. Several national organizations were given grants in 2017 to conduct opinion research within targeted audiences to develop effective messages to encourage historically undercounted populations to fill out the census. These national organizations became known as national hubs under the GOTC plan. Funders ultimately supported 31 national hubs that were able to reach historically undercounted people within states to tackle some combination of message development, materials development in multiple languages, communications with the field, technical assistance, and more. Census Counts became the "hub of hubs," working with these organizations as well as additional organizations that were not funded by the Subgroup.

## Later Additions

A few additional structures were added in 2018 and 2019 that were important elements of the overall Collaborative.

- 1.** The Kitchen Cabinet that had been meeting on policy matters began transitioning into discussion about GOTC. Many of the state coalitions were led by affiliates of State Voices. Accordingly, The Leadership Conference and State Voices initiated the State Count Action Network (S-CAN), melding the Kitchen Cabinet into this communication channel. S-CAN was intended to share information to drive census participation—particularly among the historically undercounted populations. Ultimately, it became an essential communication channel throughout the census count as the Census Bureau altered operations because of the pandemic and other factors.
- 2.** The Subgroup established the CEF in 2018. The CEF was established to support state and regional efforts to prepare for and conduct outreach to encourage full participation in the 2020 Census, with a focus on historically undercounted populations. CEF targeted its grants in states that faced particular challenges in assuring an accurate population count because of (a) high proportions of historically undercounted populations, (b) relatively fewer philanthropic resources that could be raised for this purpose, and (c) limited or no public funding available for this purpose. CEF coordinated with funders in the prioritized states and encouraged matching funds. CEF distributed \$13.8 million to groups in 28 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. All CEF grantees were added to S-CAN’s list to make sure they were getting the latest information.
- 3.** A Mis/Disinformation Lab was created with help from the Ford Foundation, below the radar in case some things went wrong with the 2020 Census. It was led by the Media Democracy Fund with assistance from Spitfire Strategies and involved some of the key national stakeholders. It kept an eye on false information being promoted about the census; some feared this would grow over time. The Lab was developing material on countering disinformation and had materials to help groups inoculate themselves. As it turned out, disinformation on related subjects, such as immigration and elections, as opposed to the census, dominated.
- 4.** Many funders and stakeholders worried about the quality of 2020 Census data, even before the pandemic started. Keesha Gaskins-Nathan of Rockefeller Brothers Fund urged the Subgroup to start an effort comprised of data experts to carefully monitor data quality. An ad hoc committee, led by Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Annie E. Casey Foundation, was created to nurture what ultimately became known as the Census Quality Reinforcement (CQR) project. CQR, which is led by Denice Ross of the National Conference on Citizenship, is in full swing as we write this evaluation. It is a

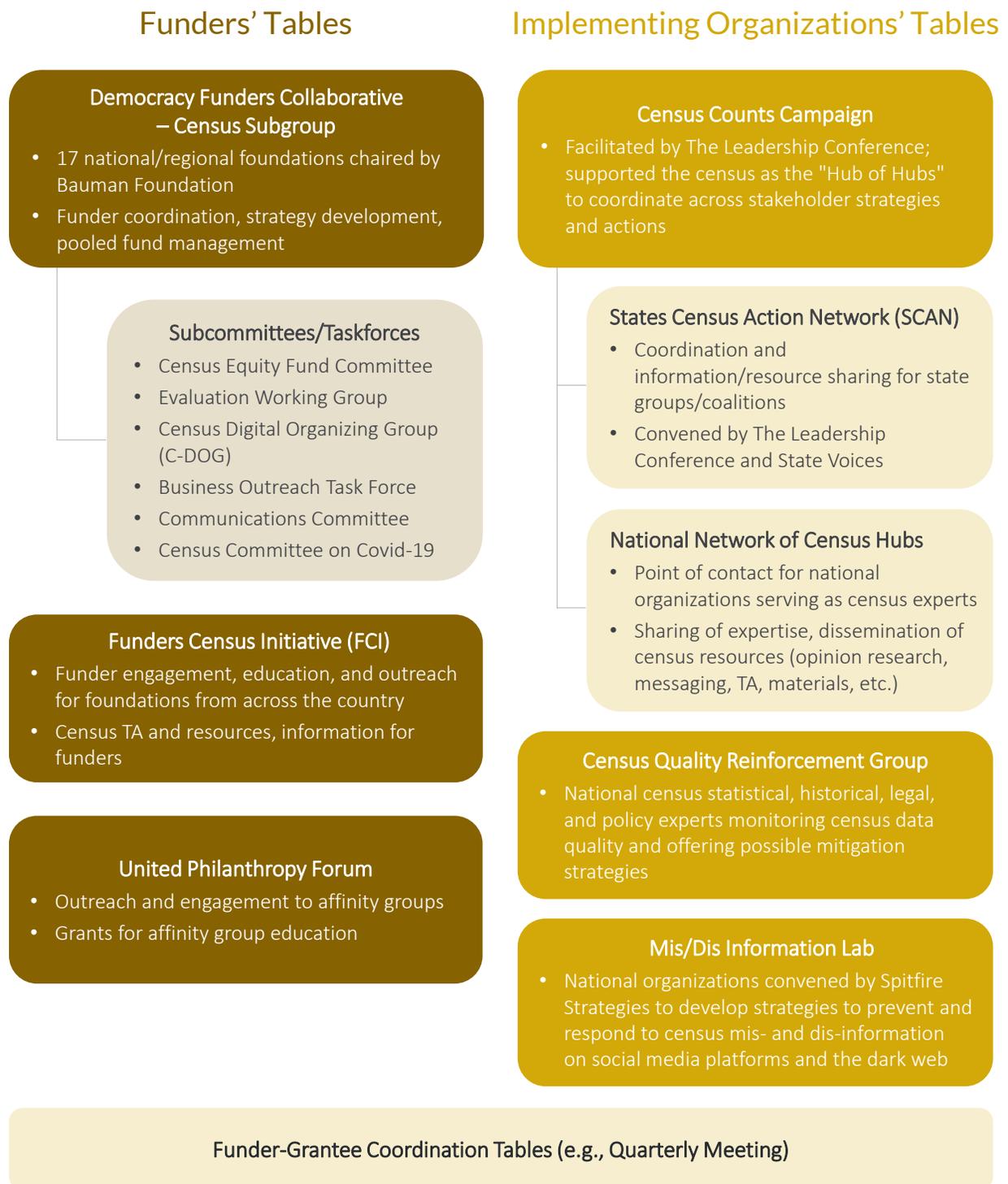
network of 200 census experts, including statisticians, demographers, and researchers, as well as national civil rights data users, examining census data quality in the context of different uses, such as apportionment, redistricting, and distribution of federal funds. That work is expected to continue at least into 2022. As such, efforts and fundraising continue today.

Figure 2 attempts to capture the Collaborative’s structures that evolved during the 2020 Census campaign as discussed above. This, of course, does not attempt to capture the many structures established within states, including pooled funds and coalitions. In addition to this overview, a case study of the Collaborative focusing on funders is also being developed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Woodwell, W. H., Jr. (2021). *Philanthropy and the 2020 Census: Stories and lessons from an unprecedented funder collaborative to protect a pillar of American democracy.*

Figure 2 | Map of Key Structures Within the Collaborative<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> This is not a comprehensive list of collaboration tables among funders and particularly among implementing organizations; instead, it aims to portray the key tables related to the Collaborative's efforts.

# About This Evaluation

This evaluation focused on assessing the main elements of the Collaborative’s work to support the 2020 Census, with a primary focus on:

- How GOTC was supported at the national level through the development and support of the Census Counts Campaign and an infrastructure of national hubs, a diverse group of national organizations that represented historically undercounted populations and contributed with specific expertise
- How state- and local-level GOTC efforts were supported through that infrastructure, and specifically how the Subgroup supported state organizations through the CEF

In addition to the focus on GOTC, we explored other parts of the strategy, albeit with lower levels of focus and amounts of data collection. We have included some description and lessons on other parts of the work, including:

- Emergent findings about conditions of success for census advocacy, as well as captured stories about two key policy wins, federal appropriations, and the citizenship question<sup>13</sup>
- Specific lessons learned about digital work, especially given the response in the field to the pandemic
- Findings from a survey of funders, which helped us to understand their experience as key stakeholders

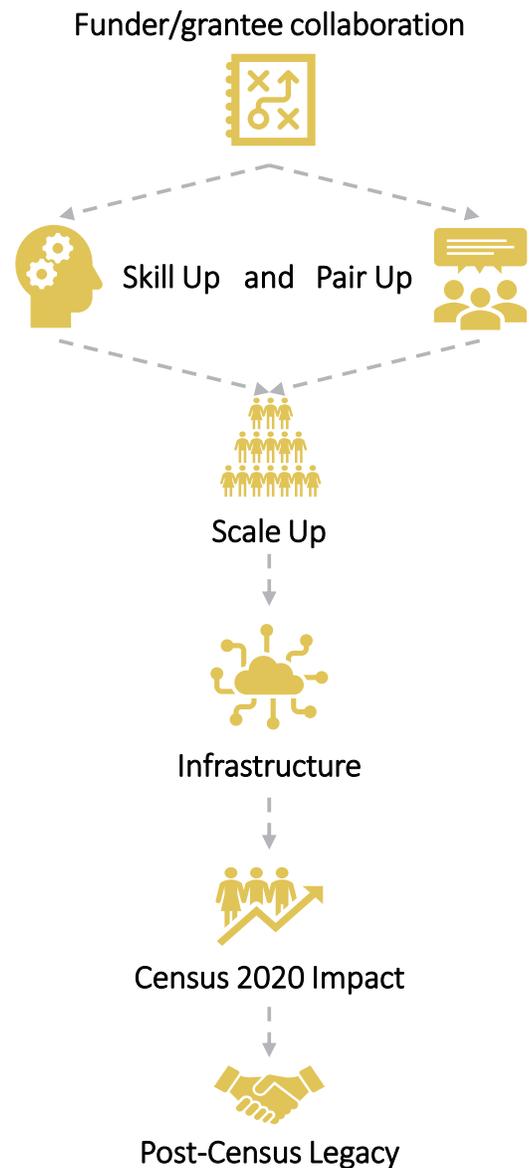
To guide our evaluation, we organized our work according to a framework developed in earlier evaluation efforts, which described how a fair and accurate count would be aided by (a) building skills of key players (“skilling up”); (b) connecting a diverse network of actors with vested interests (“pairing up”); (c) and broadening reach of resources, materials, supports, and attention through what essentially used a network of networks approach (“scaling up”), as shown in Figure 3.

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<sup>13</sup> Case studies about advocacy efforts related to federal appropriations and the citizenship question were included as separate documents from this evaluation and available in FCI’s website: <https://funderscommittee.org/learning-evaluations/>

Figure 3 | Expected Outcomes from National Funders' 2020 Census Strategy

- **Funder/Grantee Collaboration:** Funders and grantees coordinate around a shared plan of action to focus on historically undercounted populations and support national- and state- level efforts.
- **Skill Up and Pair Up:** Grants for hubs, CEF, resources and expert support help organizations build census capacity (skill up) and collaborate (pair up).
- **Scale Up:** Funder strategy reaches trusted messengers at a broader scale than possible otherwise.
- **Infrastructure:** Increased spaces, structures, and entities that promote information sharing, coordination, connectivity, and collaboration.
- **Census 2020 Impact Goal:** Improved response rates, particularly among historically undercounted populations to ensure a fair and accurate Census.
- **Post-Census Legacy:** Organizations develop skills and partnerships that strengthen civic engagement post Census 2020.



We continued to learn about these processes through the end of active census data collection, seeking to understand what kinds of capacities and partnerships different stakeholders built or leveraged, as well as the uptake of the supports and resources provided. Given the volatile context, the evaluation also attended to how the infrastructure (i.e., the organizations, partnerships, tables, communications, etc.) developed helped all parties pivot and adapt to ever-changing circumstances.

This framework served as a guide to assess the Collaborative’s impact based on the degree to which the array of strategies and tactics worked as intended. Specifically, the evaluation sought to answer a set of evaluation questions including the following:

- To what extent did the Collaborative make progress against the Plan of Action?
- What was the value add of the Collaborative’s strategy and approach?
- What were the main challenges and how did the Collaborative respond? How did it help defend against challenges to an accurate count?
- To what extent and how did the Collaborative support GOTC efforts at the national and state level?
- What infrastructure was built nationally and in different states?
- To what extent did the census promote new or strengthened relationships and partnerships that actors leveraged beyond the census?
- What are key lessons and action items for different stakeholders looking ahead to the 2030 Census?

We answered these questions with a mixed methods approach, triangulating, when possible, across informants (e.g., key stakeholders, national hub representatives) and types of data (e.g., interviews, surveys, secondary data). More detailed information on the various data collection efforts, sampling approaches, strengths, and limitations can be found in Appendix A. Like all census stakeholders, the evaluation pivoted and changed timelines several times to adjust to the external context. It was ultimately designed to understand the work leading up to and through the end of the Census Bureau’s count on October 15, 2020. Figure 4 provides a timeline with a summary of key events related to the 2020 Census.

It is important to note what the evaluation does not do. The evaluation was focused on the national-level strategy; it was never designed to be an evaluation of individual grantees or an impact evaluation to assess contributions to the quality of the count. Nor does it provide a complete story of the ebbs and flows of the pivots and changes along the way. The evaluation does seek to understand how well interim outcomes within the framework were achieved as the way to assess the quality of the strategy design and implementation. Additionally, the evaluation sought to understand the cumulative benefits and lessons learned from across the Collaborative, Subgroup, and other key stakeholders’ efforts over time.

Figure 4 | Timeline of Key Events Related to the 2020 Census





# EVALUATION FINDINGS BY AREA OF FOCUS

The Collaborative’s Plan of Action outlined three main areas of focus to support a fair and accurate census, including supporting GOTC efforts, supporting advocacy efforts toward policy improvements, and expanding the base of census stakeholders.

This evaluation’s main focus is assessing the Collaborative’s support for GOTC efforts, which represented 60% of the Subgroup’s grantmaking. Specifically, this section examines how the Collaborative supported national- and state-level GOTC infrastructures through:

- **A national infrastructure** of expert organizations, which developed and supported the Census Counts Campaign and funded a set of national hubs, a diverse group of expert national organizations that represented historically undercounted populations and contributed specific expertise.
- **State and local GOTC support** through (a) Census Equity Fund (CEF) grants to 69 organizations in 28 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico, which were identified as locations with high concentrations of historically undercounted populations and low public and private census funding; and (b) information, resource sharing, and other supports from the State Counts Action Network and collaborations between national hubs and their affiliate structures.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> There were additional grants made to libraries, immigration organizations, organizations working with formerly incarcerated people, and faith-based groups, on which our evaluation did not focus explicitly.

In addition to the focus on GOTC, we explored other parts of the strategy, albeit with lower levels of focus and data collection. We have included some description and lessons on:

- **Digital outreach efforts:** Specific lessons learned about digital work, given the prominent focus and need that emerged while the count occurred during state lockdowns
- **Policy improvements:** Emergent findings about the hub organizations' census advocacy as well as captured stories about two key wins: appropriations and the citizenship question
- **Funder engagement:** Findings from a survey of funders to understand their experience as key stakeholders

# National Infrastructure

The circumstances surrounding the 2020 Census—fear and mistrust of government and the pandemic—made the role of local trusted community voices and messengers even more critical in encouraging the participation of historically undercounted populations. However, knowledge and understanding of the census is transient in many community-based organizations because most of these organizations only engage in the census every decade, if at all. These circumstances made a national infrastructure with census expertise and resources necessary. The national infrastructure was created in primarily two phases. The first phase was focused on advocacy, messaging, and research to ensure the census was adequately funded and addressed operational issues, and the second phase was focused on GOTC.

A core group of national organizations that focus on the census on an on-going basis were funded to focus on federal advocacy; they became the core of the national hub network.<sup>15</sup> This group of national organizations continued to expand as the Subgroup continued to successfully fundraise. In the end, the network expanded to include a total of 31 organizations that would support phase two, GOTC (Table 1).<sup>16</sup> In addition, the Subgroup also supported a number of organizations representing state and local government including the National Conference of State Legislatures, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, and U.S. Conference of Mayors.

The national hubs provided a broad reach into a variety of historically undercounted populations. These hubs were not funded to be “the” infrastructure or to create a top-down hierarchy. Rather, the Subgroup’s intent was to centralize census supports and resources to enable state and local groups to innovate and develop culturally competent, hyperlocal GOTC strategies. These national organizations served as expert census resources to their respective constituency. Each national hub provided community-specific campaigns (i.e., *Hágase Contar*, *Yalla Count Me In*, *Make Black Count*, *Indian Country Counts*, etc.). They also provided census training, materials, toolkits, technical assistance, messaging, and coordination to its network of members, partners, and/or affiliates to support the GOTC efforts of community-based organizations and trusted messengers. These national hubs worked to educate, inform, and build the census capacity of state and local organizations.

Unlike the 2010 Census, hubs were not funded to provide grants to their affiliates and members in states and on the ground. Based on the 2010 experience, funders believed state

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<sup>15</sup> Some examples included: Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC; Leadership Conference Education Fund; Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund; National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Education Fund; and The Census Project.

<sup>16</sup> Get Out the Count 2020: An Implementation Plan. February 2018.

and local foundations were better positioned to support this work. National funding would “support the infrastructure to help regional, state, and local funders have the information and technical assistance they need to form funder collaboratives where there is interest or to develop individual strategies, including increasing funding to existing grantees for their work on the census.”<sup>17</sup>

The Census Counts Campaign, housed at The Leadership Conference (also a national hub), played a central role in supporting coordination and information sharing across hubs, states, and stakeholders. A pool of census experts, researchers, and consultants provided technical support to this network of organizations to inform strategies, messaging, and advocacy. A third phase of the census ultimately emerged to address data quality issues, and once again, the Subgroup raised resources to support a three-pronged funding plan that focused on communications, data integrity, and mitigation.

The “census infrastructure” received much praise in facilitating this national initiative. The national infrastructure, the focus of this section, is comprised of four components: (1) the network of national hub organizations that created a nationwide census network that reached into and connected state and local organizations; (2) the Census Counts Campaign, that served as the hub of hubs and centralized resources and information; (3) the cadre of census experts and consulting support that informed all aspects of the initiative and its strategies; and (4) the funder collaborative led by the Democracy Funders Census Subgroup and the Funder Census Initiative that served as the centralized coordinating table for all funders nationwide. (Note: findings related to the funders are treated separately and are discussed later in the report.) This section describes the key findings about the national infrastructure:

- A network of national hub organizations was formed around the 2020 Census, which helped hubs leverage each other’s expertise, skills, and resources in support of the census and ultimately helped them to respond and adapt to emerging challenges.
- The hub network effectively connected national, state, and local organizations on the census and to a range of critical census resources that supported their GOTC work. The two-way relationships between national hubs and their affiliates allowed these organizations to mutually inform each other’s census work and rapidly respond and modify strategies.
- The pandemic forced an increased reliance on technology and social media strategies among the hub network, which resulted in increased social media capacity and innovation with affiliates on the ground. It also led to a greater use of local media, ad, and mail campaigns and distribution of materials.

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<sup>17</sup> Get Out the Count 2020: An Implementation Plan. February 2018.

- The Census Counts Campaign played a critical role as the hub-of-hubs but also as an overarching campaign lead that centralized resources and information and enabled rapid response.
- The availability of centralized research, analysis, and technical expert support informed and strengthened census activities throughout all phases of the census.

**Table 1 | List of National Hubs**

<i>Constituency Served</i>	<i>National Hubs</i>
African Americans	Black Alliance for Just Immigration
	Color of Change
	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
	National Coalition for Black Civic Participation
	National Urban League
Arab Americans	American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
	Arab American Institute Foundation
Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders	Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)
	APIAVote
Libraries	American Library Association
Business and business organizations	ReadyNation (project of Council for Strong America)
Children	Partnership for America’s Children
Immigrant and mixed-status families	Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)/Community Change
	Center for Popular Democracy
	United We Dream
Latinx	NALEO Educational Fund
Civic engagement tables and Co-coordinator of States Counts Action Network	State Voices
Civil Rights and Co-coordinator of States Counts Action Network	Leadership Conference Education Fund/Census Counts Campaign
Faith based	Faith in Action
	Faith in Public Life
	National African American Clergy Network
	National Latino Evangelical Coalition
	Shepherding the Next Generation (project of Council for Strong America)
LGBTQ	National LGBTQ Task Force
Disability	The Arc of the United States
Low-income and low-literacy households	Community Action Partnership
	Formerly Incarcerated Convicted People and Families Movement (FICPFM)
	National Coalition for Literacy
Native Americans and Native Alaskans	Native American Rights Fund
	National Congress of American Indians
	National Urban Indian Family Coalition

**A network of national hub organizations was formed around the 2020 Census, which helped hubs leverage each other's expertise, skills, and resources in support of the census and ultimately helped them to respond and adapt to emerging challenges.**

The network of 31 national hubs reflected diversity in geographic and population reach, as well as a range of experiences in census work, a niche policy issue that not many organizations focus on or have expertise in. A quarter of the national hubs (25%) described the census as a core issue that they work on regularly, and 75% of national hubs needed to build their capacity on the census. Newer organizations relied on experienced census organizations to get up to speed on the census. Newer organizations also brought in new networks that reached into various historically undercounted populations, such as children (0–5 years old), Black immigrants, faith leaders, people with disabilities, direct service providers, and more.

To understand how this group of organizations functioned as a network rather than just a set of individual organizations, we asked each hub to systematically rate the degree to which they worked with every other hub: not at all, occasionally, or regularly. Results from these questions allowed us to conduct social network analysis (SNA), a set of tests that augmented the information we heard through interviews to better understand how connected organizations were to each other and what those connections mean about the role they played across the network.

The map that follows illustrates the connections made in several ways:

- Size of circles: The larger the circle, the more connections that organization had.
- Thickness of lines: Thicker lines show more regular collaboration; thinner lines are for occasional work together.

It is important to know that we organized the placement of the organizational circles to reflect what we were starting to see from the SNA metrics: we grouped those that played more central, highly connected roles in the center and hubs that reached the same historically undercounted population nearer to each other.

Network analysis allows us to better understand this group of organizations with more of an ecosystem or infrastructure lens, seeing the whole and the interaction of the parts differently than if we were to simply interpret feedback from interviews. The two maps that follow show the number of connections reflecting regular work followed by the number of connections reflecting occasional work together. We are not privileging one level of connection over the other; rather we think the two maps provide better insight into the functioning of the network.

Figure 5 | Social Network Analysis Mapping across National Hubs: Regularly Worked Together

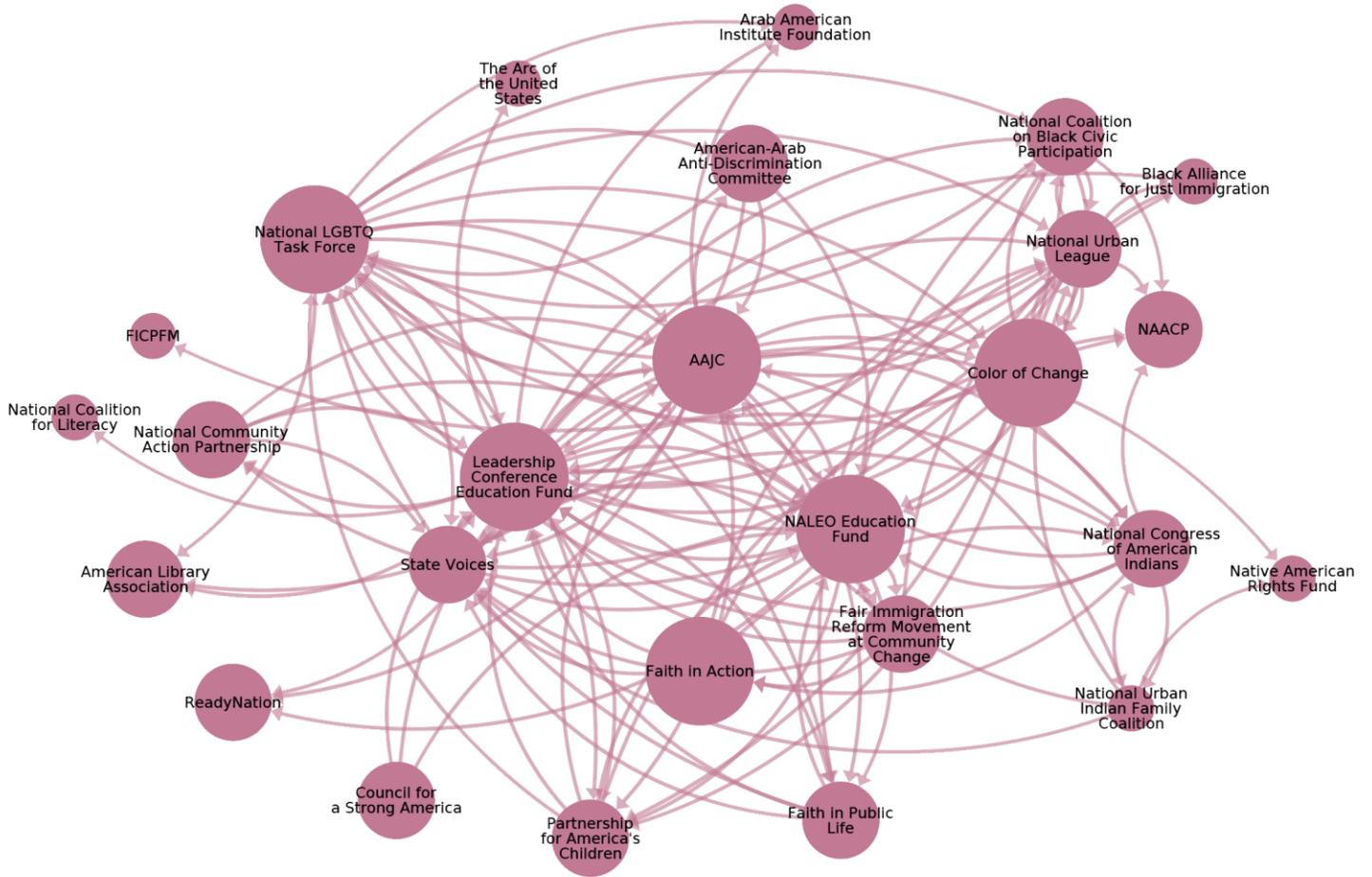
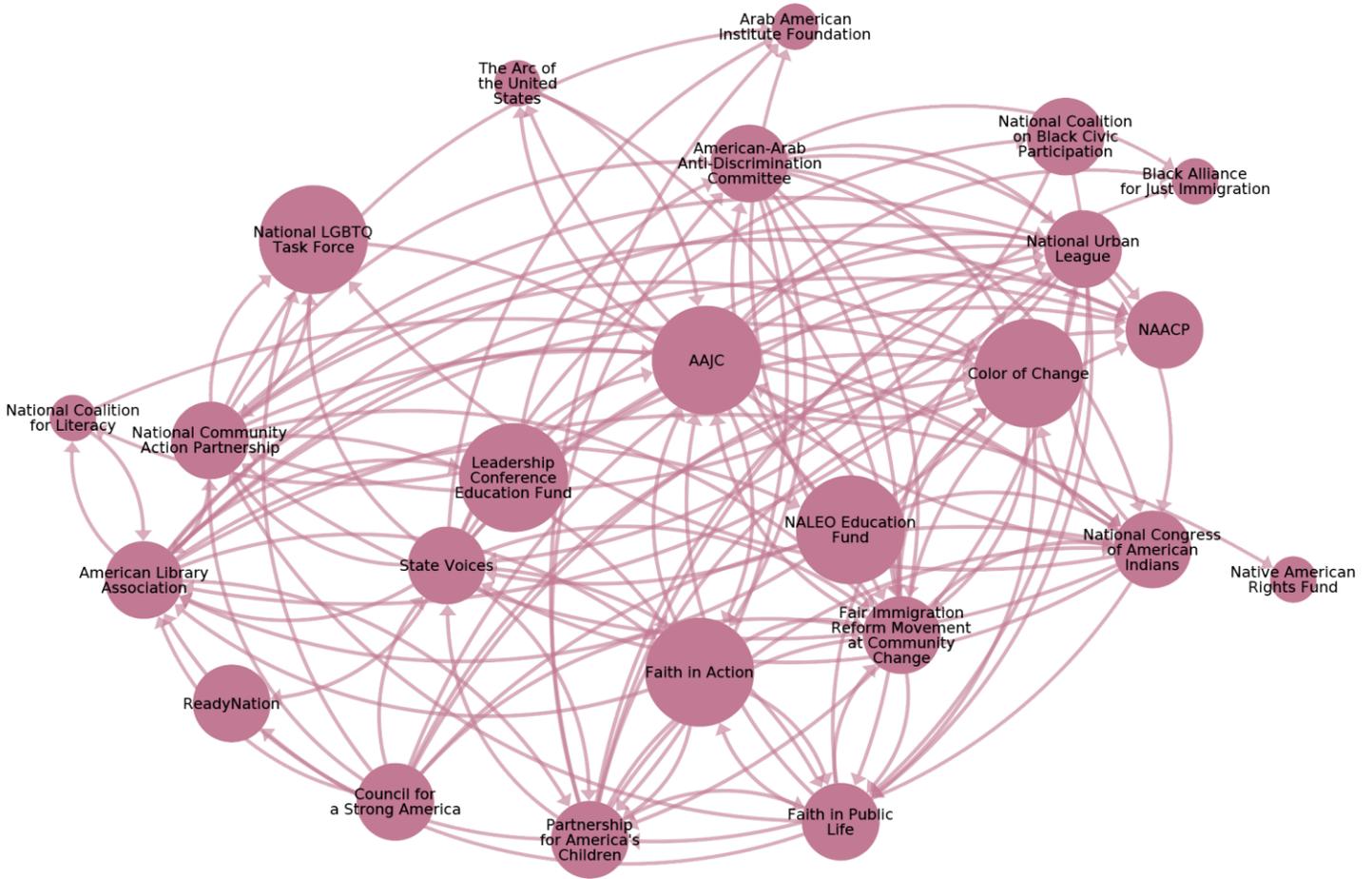


Figure 6 | Social Network Analysis Mapping across national hubs: Occasionally Worked Together



Overall, SNA showed that national hubs fell into four groups that reflected the roles they played in the network:

- Core group of well-connected national organizations.** These national hubs were well connected to the overall network of hubs, providing strong interconnections between other organizations that might not have otherwise been connected. With their breadth of connections, this group served as “bridgers” and “broadcasters”<sup>18</sup> for the overall network. Most of these organizations had long-standing census experience, large census campaigns that served as a resource to others, and relationships that were further deepened through census advocacy and other related activities. These

<sup>18</sup> These assessments reflect measures of centrality using social network analysis. “Bridgers” have higher closeness centrality, serving as organizations with the shortest direct and indirect paths to all other members of the network. “Brokers” have high betweenness centrality, serving as organizations on the shortest path between the most pairs of otherwise unconnected members of the network.

groups included Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, The Leadership Conference, NALEO, and National Urban League. In addition, the National LGBTQ Taskforce, and Faith in Action were also part of this group of well-connected organizations. Faith in Action is newer to the census but its connections may be attributed to its nationwide grassroots organizing network that the organization connected to other national hubs. The LGBTQ Taskforce emerged in this census cycle as an important new census advocate that collaboratively integrated LGBTQ populations into the census outreach of other hubs, making it a valued resource in the network.

- **Well-connected, high influence organizations.** These hubs had high influence in the network through their connections across the hubs.<sup>19</sup> These groups are more in the middle ring of the SNA map and included Color of Change, Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The network data reflect some characteristics of these groups, such as Color of Change’s online network and its role in developing and disseminating messages and digital resources. As an organizing network of immigrant rights groups, this reflects FIRM’s role in reaching immigrant populations and the role they played in the citizenship question. This data also reflects NAACP’s high influence in the network through its many and varied affiliates.
- **Moderately connected organizations.** These hubs were less connected than the most connected in the network but still had strong connectedness. These organizations were viewed as a resource on their respective populations. Several of these hubs were cross-cutting population organizations that wove across the ethnically focused hubs. These hubs included Partnership for America’s Children, National Community Action Partnership, and the National Congress of American Indians. These hubs had connectedness across the network that was lower than the core group but still provided a solid set of relationships. For example, the Partnership for America’s Children worked to elevate the importance of counting young children among all hubs but worked deeply with only a few organizations such as NALEO to develop a campaign focused on Latinx children. These organizations are mapped on the outside edge of the SNA map but have slightly larger circle sizes.
- **Less connected organizations.** Ten of the hub organizations had the fewest connections to others in the network and had at least 10 other organizations that said that they had not worked with them. This set of organizations may have been less connected because of circumstances (e.g., some joined late, some ended early); some

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<sup>19</sup> This assessment is based on Eigenvector Centrality, which measures influence by looking at both a network member’s number of links as well as how well connected its connections are.

focused only on their target population or within their umbrella group. These are mapped on the outside edge of the SNA map but have smaller circle sizes.

*“This network has been incredibly impactful, period. There are literally hundreds of organizations plugged into census outreach and organizing, and that is 100% due to the work that the funders’ collaborative has funded and that the hub organizations are doing, and that the next layer and the next layer and next layer of work organizations are doing. I think this is probably the most effective campaign I’ve ever worked on, and it’s brilliant.”*

**– Census Stakeholder**

While the network was relatively well connected, hubs reported that they did not know all the national hub organizations or were not aware that certain organizations were national hubs; this may account for the hubs that were less connected to the network. The addition of new hub organizations later in the process and the inability for organizations to meet in person because of the pandemic may have also contributed to this lack of connection. While this did not create any reported challenges, it may have resulted in missed opportunities.

On-going collaboration helped strengthen the network and helped it respond and adapt to changing circumstances and challenges. The number of connections across the hub network, or its density,<sup>20</sup> reflects the extent of collaboration. In fact, collaboration was one of the most valued resource made available through the Collaborative. The majority of hubs (89%) rated hub partnerships as very valuable and all hubs with no prior census experience rated these partnerships as very valuable. Funder partnerships and the Census Counts Campaign (84%) and coordinating and information sharing tables (73%) both of which facilitated collaboration were also highly valued. Finally, funder partnerships were highly valued by 84% of hubs. People who had familiarity with the hubs and the overarching Collaborative facilitated these connections.

*“A lot of the efforts to make connections among the hubs came from Karen Narasaki. She knew exactly everybody and who was doing what.”*

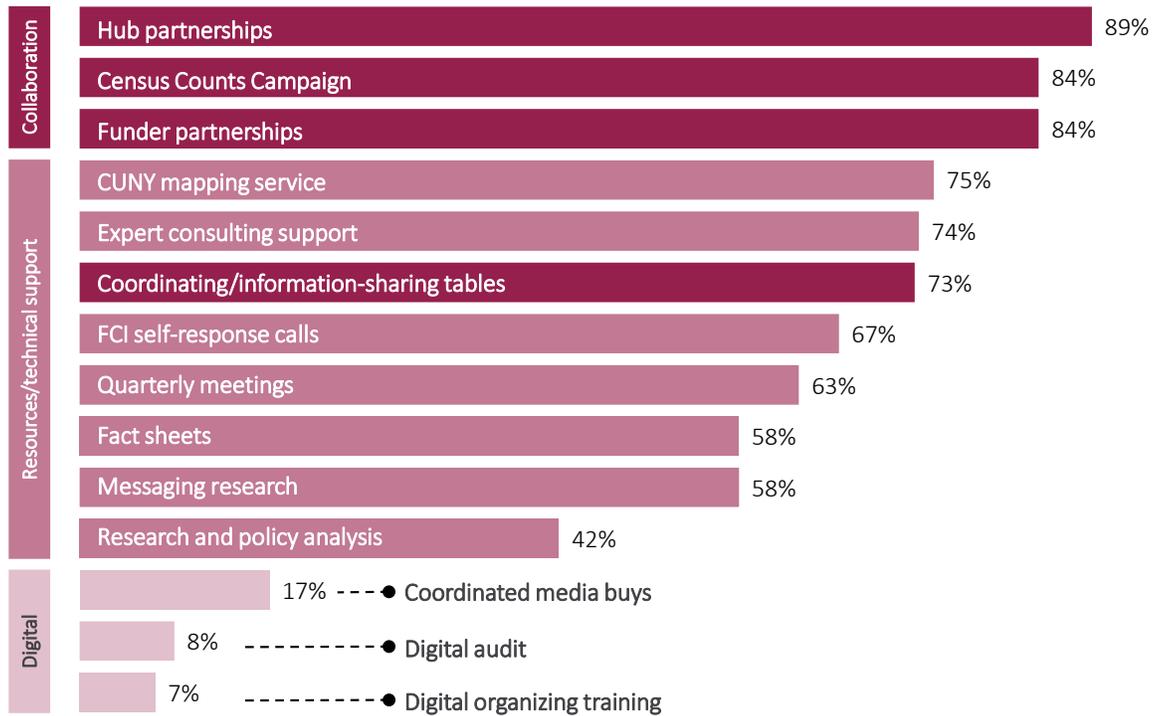
**– National Hub**

Both Narasaki and Beth Lynk played important “network weaver” roles. Connections were also facilitated by creating spaces that helped organizations share information and self-organize. Hubs reported that the most valuable resources were partnerships and the structures and tables that facilitated collaboration, such as the Census Counts Campaign (see Figure 7). They also described wanting more opportunities to directly connect to each other.

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<sup>20</sup> The hub network had a density of close to 60%, meaning 60% of all possible connections existed within the network.

Figure 7 | Helpfulness of the Collaborative’s Resources for National Hubs<sup>21</sup>



Hubs collaborated on all aspects of the 2020 Census, from the development of census resources and toolkits, messaging points, and communications strategies to congressional and Census Bureau advocacy. Collaboration on the development of messaging was particularly important for the creation of accurate, culturally appropriate communications. Messaging research informed the development of outreach materials and strategies. Only some of the national hubs were funded to conduct messaging research for targeted populations, which was shared across the hubs, and 58% of hubs rated this research as a very valuable resource. Based on this research, joint messaging webinars and trainings were developed among the hubs to ensure consistent messaging on cross-cutting populations. Coordinated messaging informed by research guided the response to the addition of the citizenship question and addressed lack of trust in government.

<sup>21</sup>National hubs were asked to rate how helpful these resources were for their census work on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high). These figures represent average ratings across all national hubs’ responses. Coordinating/information-sharing tables, while a coordinating resource to hubs, rated lower than hub and funder partnerships and the Census Counts Campaign, hence appearing further down in the graphic.

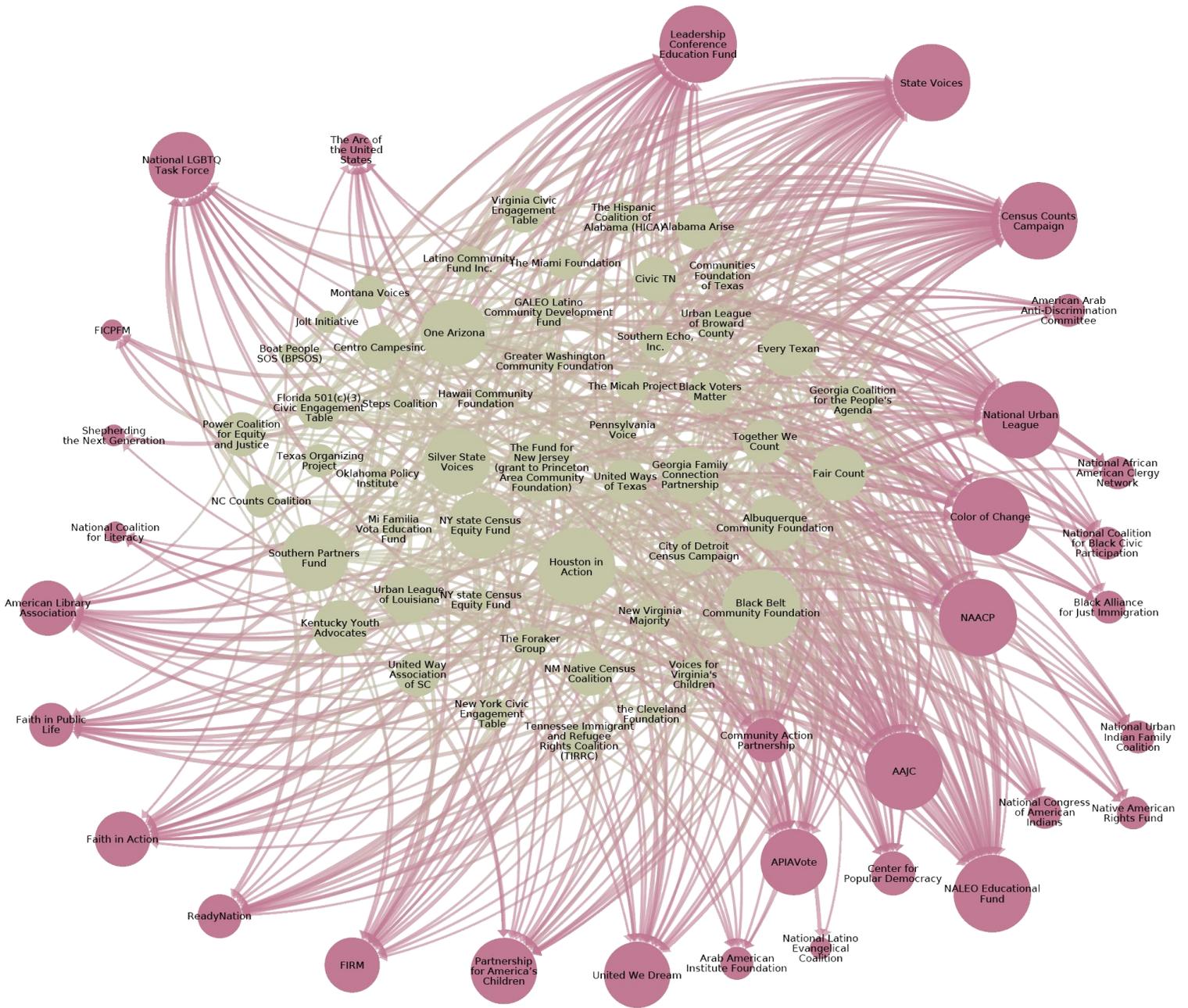
*“The hubs provided good official standing when we were having conversations with the Census Bureau and other stakeholders. When you say these are hubs of the Latinx community or this is the hub of the Arab American community as it relates to the census, that really means something to external partners and that’s really helpful.”*

*– Census Stakeholder*

The hub network effectively connected national, state, and local organizations on the census and to a range of critical census resources that supported their GOTC work. The two-way relationships between national hubs and their affiliates allowed these organizations to mutually inform each other’s census work and rapidly respond and modify strategies.

To get insight into the ways in which the hub network supported state and local work, we looked at how CEF grantees said they had connected to different hub organizations. As with the hubs, CEF grantees said, for each hub, whether they had received direct support (e.g., training, technical assistance, on-the-ground GOTC collaboration), indirect support (e.g., toolkits, materials), both direct and indirect support, or no support. As the SNA map that follows shows, CEF grantees had strong connections to the hub infrastructure. As in the preceding maps, the larger the circle, the more connections. Pink circles on the outside edge are hubs; green circles in the interior are CEF grantees.

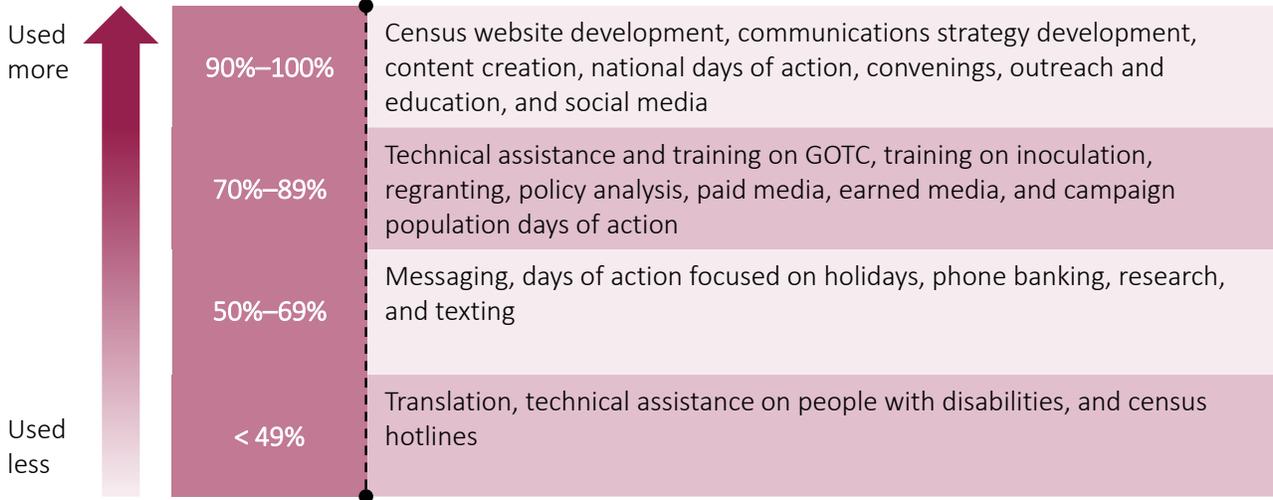
Figure 8 | Connections Between CEF Grantees and National Hub Organizations



A primary function of the national hub network was to connect state and local affiliates to centralized census resources and supports. Hubs created a slew of resources and tools and sometimes branded campaign materials tailored for their members and affiliates across the states they worked in. Table 2 depicts the wide range of census strategies and resources hubs used and provided to their members and partners. It also reflects the depth of the initiative

and resources and supports they developed to help engage groups on the ground in the census. Hubs used some resources more frequently than others.

**Table 2 | Percentage of National Hubs Who Used Different Collaborative Resources**



The national hub structure promoted the development of shared census materials and resources, informed GOTC strategies, supported collective action, and helped organizations on all levels—national, state, and local—to pivot in response to the on-going challenges. However, while a goal of the strategy was to reduce duplication and promote efficiency, particularly in the creation of collateral census materials, many reported issues with redundancy in the production of materials and even inaccurate census resource materials.

When the Census Bureau was late in its development of materials, the resources produced by the national hubs became even more important; as one hub explained, “in the absence of collateral and public facing materials from the Census Bureau, it's been materials we've developed that people are using now in the field.” Hubs also tailored their materials and messages in response to urgent events, such as the Supreme Court ruling on the citizenship question.

To support the work of their affiliates and partners on the ground, 79% of hubs engaged in regranting. Resources helped expand the number of organizations working on the census and allowed them to hire staff or support existing staff for dedicated census work. Funding also helped them build their technology capacity for digital outreach during the pandemic.

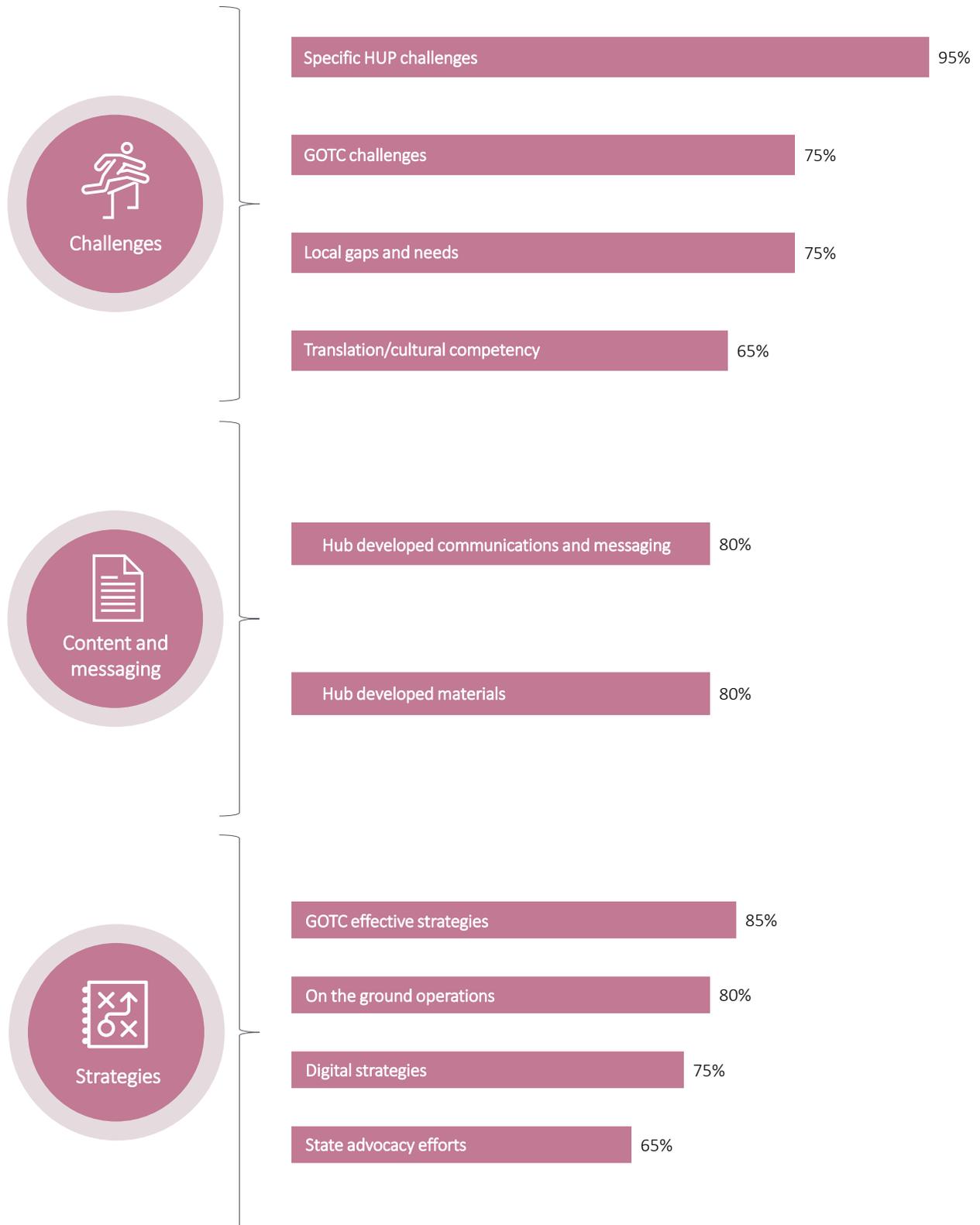
The impact of the pandemic on the census, the changing census timeline, and the politicization of the census tied to the political context, made the network of national hubs even more important to helping keep state and local organizations apprised of changes to the census and supporting them in how to respond.

At the same time, state and local organizations served as the on-the-ground eyes and ears on census operations. According to a Census Bureau official:

*“Their ability to be that bellwether of things like problems, positive things, issues that were brewing all around the country, and communicate that to us in really useful ways and timeframes so that we could prepare to respond to a larger audience on that issue, was immeasurably valuable.”*

Figure 9 describes the range of issues on which affiliates provided information. Almost all hubs described receiving feedback from their affiliates, including information on challenges related to historically undercounted populations on the ground, information related to GOTC operations and challenges, and local gaps and needs. Some specific examples hubs reported included the laying off of census takers despite a Federal Court order to continue operations, the lack of pandemic precautions and use of personal protective equipment by some census enumerators, and the inability to complete the census via the Bureau’s dedicated phone lines. National hubs took up these and many more issues national hubs with the Census Bureau. As a result of feedback and intel from affiliates, over 40% of hubs reported modifying their materials and or messaging, and 35% reported modifying their strategy.

Figure 9 | Issues That Affiliates Communicated to National Hubs



The pandemic forced an increased reliance on technology and social media strategies among the hub network, which resulted in increased social media capacity and innovation with affiliates on the ground. It also led to greater use of local media, ad and mail campaigns, and distribution of materials.

While the 2020 Census was plagued with many challenges, the pandemic was identified as the greatest challenge among all the hubs and their affiliates, forcing organizations to rely more on technology and shift to digital and social media strategies. Hubs frequently described a slew of technology-related challenges, but two most frequently cited challenges were lack of organizational capacity for digital engagement and the appropriateness and efficacy of the strategy for reaching some target populations.

Although a majority of hubs indicated leveraging their existing digital expertise, hubs across the board had to build some level of capacity to use technology and implement digital strategies. Some of the larger organizations with communication teams or departments noted that they did not have sufficient capacity for innovative and on-going tracking of digital engagement. For other national organizations, it was their first attempt at “developing an online practice and use of social media platforms,” and they noted that in the future, these tools and platforms would be useful to their on-going engagement with members.

*“We were having to become not just technical experts in subject matter but also we were having to become technical experts in technology.”*

**– National Hub**

Hubs reported building capacity on creating virtual events (60%), digital communications (40%), data management (40%), and texting (30%). The hubs’ ability to implement these strategies had a direct impact on their affiliates, who reported that some of the most popular resources they received were the media tools developed or provided by national hubs (62%) and social media strategies (61%). Capacity building also trickled down to the hub affiliates and partners with close to 40% reporting they built their digital communications capacity and ability to use new technological tools. Some national hubs provided small grants to support digital capacity building and access to online platforms, such as Zoom and Webex. Other hubs provided trainings and digital academies on creating and posting digital content, and hubs also created digital content for use by affiliates and partners.

In spite of the challenges, hubs reported two important outcomes: partners were able to reach more people, and the digital pivot led to innovative and adaptive approaches among

their affiliates and partners. For example, ARC of Texas worked with Disability Rights Texas and self-advocates to develop creative, humorous, and informative videos on the census in the theme of *The Young and the Restless*, and NALEO partners created a Selena digital toolkit based on the popstar’s song “El Chico del Apartamento 512” and held a Selena karaoke night during the Latino census week of action.

*“I don’t think digital organizing was really something that a lot of our tables had sufficient capacity with. That was the number one thing that we just realized through all of this; it gave us an opportunity to really build out more digital organizing, not just at the national level but really to help the states hone their skills as it related to all of that.”*

**– National Hub**

Digital and social media strategies were also not one size fits all or appropriate for all target audiences because of technology issues and access to broadband. To address the digital divide, hubs and the Census Counts Campaign provided Wi-Fi hot spots and advocated to local businesses to extend their Wi-Fi. But even with these strategies, reaching some populations was a challenge. As one hub put it, *“If you build it, they may or may not come.”* As a result, many hubs and their affiliates relied more heavily on outreach strategies, such as earned media and ethnic media, radio ads, billboards, posters, mail campaigns, flyers and leaflets on doors, and insertion of census materials such as in food distribution boxes.

### **The citizenship question and the social uprisings in response to the George Floyd murder created challenges for the census but were also opportunities for power building for some national hubs and their constituencies.**

The political issues and challenges that impacted the census were numerous and on-going, but two events in particular were inflection points for organizations: the attempt to include a citizenship question in the census and the social justice uprisings as a result of the police killing of George Floyd.

The citizenship question became a rallying call for stakeholders and was an all-hands-on-deck moment. “It mobilized a whole new cohort of stakeholders,” said one hub. It also reflected the unique and important role of immigrant rights organizations in the hub network. The work on the citizenship question exemplified collaboration across the hub network. The national infrastructure helped hubs to organize and develop a campaign around the litigation that included communications and messaging, advocacy, and scenario planning based on the outcome of the litigation. The issue and the litigation itself were used as organizing tools, as

one hub explained: “We used the courts and the process of litigation to educate our communities, to agitate our communities, and to engage our communities.”

The presence of grassroots organizing and immigrant rights national networks facilitated the engagement and mobilization of immigrant communities on the issue. While the citizenship question was intended to depress census participation, national hubs and organizers used it to elevate the awareness of the census and the importance of being counted, as one hub described:

*“People could talk passionately about what it meant to be counted, about why they felt they needed to be included, and connected to the civil rights movement. It was about the need to be counted, not only in the census but how it connected to building power and congressional power.”*

*“I remember folks saying this is an organizing fight. This is a fight about power. What they're trying to do is scare people into not speaking up. In the Trump era we were living under so much fear all we could do was minimize the fear and the damage. People decided that exercising a right to count as human beings was a fight that could be empowering to our base and we needed to have that fight.”*

**– National Hub**

The social uprisings particularly impacted organizations working in Black communities as well as hubs that worked on criminal justice issues. Many of these hubs paused their census work to participate in and support the protests. One stakeholder described the experience this way:

*“We were emotionally impacted, our own organizations were impacted. We had to turn our attention directly over there. Our community was on fire, with COVID, with police killings, senseless murders of innocent people, unarmed people. Nobody wanted to talk about the census, so we had to comfort.”*

**– National Hub**

The Census Black Roundtable was used to organize the response and use civil rights and community leaders as trusted messengers. Many state and local organizations had been linking the census to voting and building power. For example, Fair Count Georgia used the message “See Me, Hear Me,” linking the census with being seen and voting with being heard. This message was further elevated in the wake of the George Floyd killing and the civil uprisings that erupted. Killer Mike, an Atlanta-based rapper, urged protestors to take action by completing the census and voting:

*“Now is the time to plot, plan, strategize, organize and mobilize... And two of the most effective ways are first taking your butt to your computer and making sure you fill out your census, so that people know who you are and where you are. The next thing is making sure you exercise your political power in local elections and beat the politicians you don’t like.”*

**– Killer Mike**

The Census Counts Campaign and Color of Change also elevated this message and framed the census as a means to build power and take action in addition to protesting.

*“Census is connected to redistricting, redistricting is connected to elections and voting, and so we cannot disconnect it. When you look at the census, you are getting a little view of the big picture and how power works and how maps are drawn.”*

**– National Hub**

**The Census Counts Campaign played a critical role as the hub of hubs but also as an overarching campaign lead that centralized resources and information and enabled rapid response.**

The Census Counts Campaign (the Campaign) was originally conceived of as an independent campaign to be co-chaired by The Leadership Conference, NALEO Education Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, and a combination of a state and/or local elected official, a business leader, or a conservative organization. The hope was to create a campaign that reached beyond the civil rights and social justice organizations to a broader base of ideologically diverse stakeholders, including business and Republicans. However, the campaign and the campaign manager were housed within The Leadership Conference, making it challenging to create an independent identity separate from the civil rights organization. In 2018, the Campaign was successfully rebooted, and Beth Lynk was hired as the new campaign manager. The Census Counts Campaign was redesigned to “work with national groups and state coalitions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to implement proven strategies to reach populations at risk of being missed in the census leveraging message research, organizing best practices, and strategies driven by community need.”<sup>22</sup>

To support the national infrastructure, the Census Counts Campaign promoted coordination across hubs and built the census knowledge and capacity of organizations new to the census.

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<sup>22</sup> Census Counts Campaign Strategic Plan, Leadership Conference.

The campaign was very highly rated by hubs, with 84% of them rating it as “very valuable.” For the newer hubs, the Campaign was a vital lifeline on how to navigate and engage in the census. The evaluation found several factors that were key to the Campaign’s success.

## **One-Stop-Census-Shop That Strengthened the National Infrastructure Through On-Going Information Sharing**

The Census Counts Campaigns was a critical part of the census infrastructure. Described as the “nerve center” by one hub, the Campaign created a central table that convened and linked stakeholders and information across national, state, and local levels. It accomplished this in several ways:

- A website that was intended as a clearinghouse for all census information and toolkits; however, the website received mixed reviews in terms of ease of navigation and access to information.
- A two-way flow of information. Early on, a regular census taskforce convened that included a subset of the national hubs to coordinate across their campaigns and advocacy. Additionally, a regular meeting of state organizations started in order to share information and learning across states and inform national work; formerly known as the Kitchen Cabinet, this became S-CAN. The Campaign also regularly communicated to and with census stakeholders, but once the count began, that communication increased in frequency, with standing calls for various stakeholders: the Monday coalition update call, Tuesday S-CAN and stakeholder call, Friday field call, and regular email reports and updates.

*“I can’t tell you how valuable the weekly conversation was. There was not a Monday when I didn’t walk away from the conversation without having three things that I absolutely need to make sure that people know, that I need to follow up on or would have been an opportunity missed had I not been a part of the conversation. There just wasn’t really anyplace else that we were having conversations like that. It gave use the perspective of so many other organizations.”*

**– National Hub**

Similarly to the hubs, the Census Counts Campaign was not just an information provider but also received information from other hubs and state and local organizations. Acting as an information distributor, the Campaign received information from multiple sources and sent out information and messaging through their listserv, website, and regular calls. Local and state organizations (S-CAN members, hub affiliates, and other organizations on the ground) provided information and intel on the progress and challenges with census GOTC implementation, which then informed the Campaign's communications and advocacy with the Census Bureau.

At times, Census Counts needed to respond to misleading or inaccurate information and guide stakeholders on appropriate action. One hub described an incident in which members received forms appearing to be a census forms but in reality were a fundraising campaign by Republicans in many states.

*“We started to get feedback from the field that census forms were asking about people’s political affiliation. Are you a strong Republican or lean Republican, or are you a Democrat? Those letters were coming to our communities. [Census Counts was] so clutch in terms of the rapid response and how to advise our federations and community members on how to best handle it.”*

**– National Hub**

## **Addressing Misinformation and Sharing Messaging**

Misinformation and disinformation added to existing fears and distrust around the census and the federal government. The amount of misinformation and disinformation about the census itself was less than anticipated, but these issues increased in intensity around the citizenship question and the elections. The Census Counts Campaign tracked misinformation and disinformation around the April 23 Supreme Court oral argument on the citizenship question. Organizations were instructed to send inaccurate or false information to the Campaign, and proactive messages and resources were made available.

The Census Counts Campaign provided trainings on mis/disinformation and ultimately a Disinformation Lab was created and embedded in the Campaign to focus on the issue. The strategy was to anticipate, inoculate, monitor, analyze, and respond. The majority of hubs (89%) engaged in “inoculation” trainings, and 60% of them reported building their capacity on addressing mis/disinformation. The Disinformation Lab was viewed as a model approach that may be used for work against voter suppression efforts.

*“Because of the Disinformation Lab, we were able to have people document in real time misinformation, within a day or less we could have people on video in social media, in the media, in the neighborhoods with a counter message so that the misinformation never gets traction.”*

**– National Hub**

The Census Bureau provision of inconsistent and inaccurate information about census operations was ultimately a bigger challenge than misinformation and disinformation. Nearly half (40%) of hubs said the lack of consistent messaging from the Census Bureau was a challenge, and 25% identified misinformation as a challenge.

## Translating Policy and Litigation

The 2020 Census was like drinking from a firehose, with a steady stream of policy, litigation, and Census Bureau operations updates. The Campaign had regular meetings with the Census Bureau, and through their role as the coordinator of the Hill Strategy Group (a small group of national organizations focused on federal advocacy) provided regular congressional updates and action alerts. These connections gave them unique insights and understanding of the policy issues and the advocacy needs. They effectively synthesized and translated this information to stakeholders in a way that was understandable and actionable.

*“I think they were really just so well positioned at the nexus of policy and advocacy, and so were really well equipped to translate the policy issues, translate what’s going on into messaging that we could all use, into things that we could customize and iterate on.”*

— National Hub

More than 25 lawsuits were filed litigating the citizenship question, census timeline, funding, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the executive memo on apportionment data, and the executive order on citizenship data. The Census Counts Campaign provided updates and explained the implications of the litigation for organizations’ census outreach efforts and message points. For example, the Campaign played an important translation role in the citizenship question litigation. In coordination with FIRM, NALEO, and other national hubs, the Campaign distributed toolkits and message points aligned with each phase of the litigation in the Supreme Court: oral arguments, between oral arguments and the decision, and decision day. Conversely, the presence of a national infrastructure allowed the litigation to be embedded in the overarching strategy and allowed litigators to identify plaintiffs and connect advocacy strategies to the litigation.

## Connecting to the Whole

The census network was vast and included hundreds of organizations and 31 national hubs, many of which had not worked together prior to the census. The scope of this Collaborative left some organizations feeling a bit lost and overwhelmed. *“Understanding the landscape was a little challenging and there was a lot happening,”* said one of the newer hubs. Very few organizations and individuals had a birds-eye view and understanding of the entire ecosystem. The Census Counts Campaign grounded organizations and connected them to the larger network of organizations and stakeholders. One hub referred to them as the “glue” connecting organizations to each other and to resources toward a shared goal. Because of the central role the Campaign played, it was often described by some hubs and stakeholders as “the infrastructure” of the Collaborative, and often synonymously associated with its

director, Beth Lynk. This was a testament to the approach Lynk took with the Campaign and the trust she built with organizations over time. She served as a connector and often an advocate for organizations. As one hub explained:

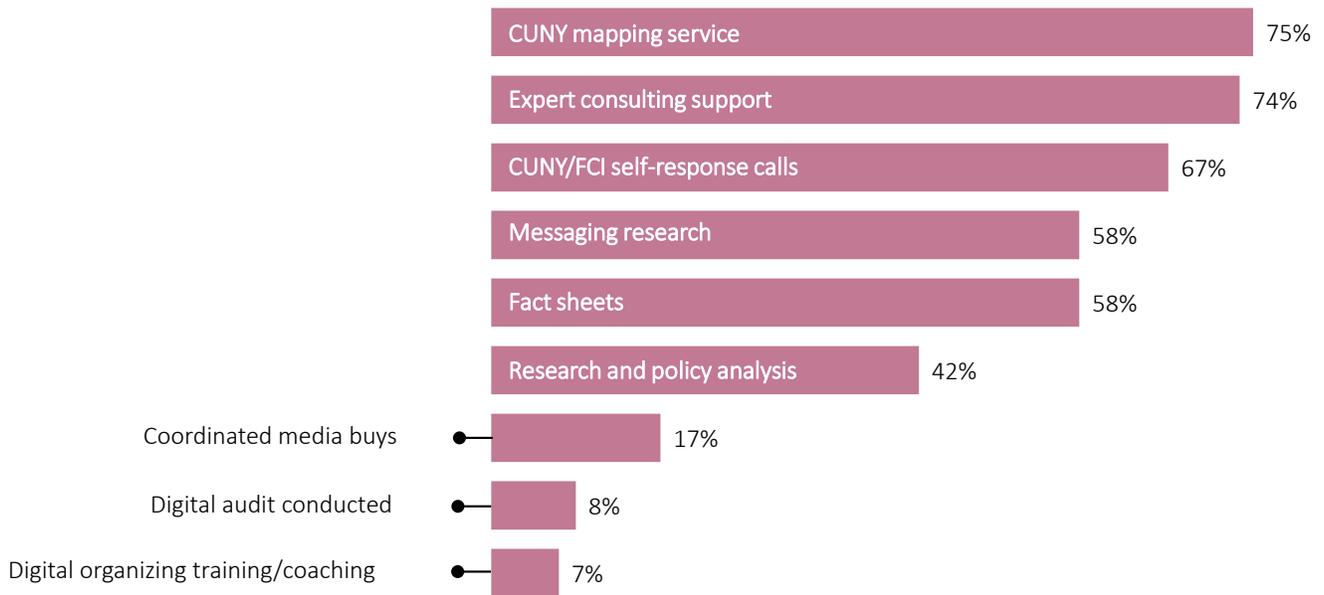
*“Beth was able to get us a seat at the table. She took my calls. She heard our team and looked at the data that we pulled showing we were still experiencing undercounts in Indian country at really high levels, and we still were being underserved by the Bureau’s operation. She took that seriously and made sure that we were at the table in key conversations and at a high-level, visible-speaking function so that others could hear our issues as well.”*

**The availability of centralized research, analysis, and technical expert support informed and strengthened census activities throughout all phases of the census.**

Early in the initiative, funders supported what became a growing pool of technical experts in support of advocacy efforts, the GOTC, and data quality (See Figure 10). As needs and challenges emerged, funders responded with additional technical support as appropriate. This support included research and policy analysis, technical census support, communications, and digital support. Not all resources were created for or made available to all census stakeholders. Overall, the resources were well received by their intended audience. Census stakeholders conveyed that the support provided by these consultants helped build capacity, informed advocacy and outreach strategies, increased readiness, and helped organizations be responsive and adaptive.

Additional insights on key elements of this approach related to research and policy analysis, technical census support, and digital and communications support are described below.

Figure 10 | Overview of Most Valuable Technical Resources for National Hubs



## Research and Policy Analysis

A slew of reports, analysis, and tools were funded and made available: most notably, the CUNY Graduate Center’s interactive “Hard to Count” maps<sup>23</sup> and the George Washington “Counting for Dollars” project.<sup>24</sup> The CUNY map was rated as “very valuable” by 75% of hubs, and the FCI—organized weekly calls with CUNY on the census self-response rates—was rated as very valuable by 67% of hubs. The CUNY map, a mainstay in the 2010 Census, were once again a central touchstone for census planning and implementation of GOTC strategies. The maps were widely used beyond the hubs and across stakeholders. One funder noted,

*“We are using the data and the map and made sure that our network has access to all those resources, so that they can target the communities of most need. And then we are using the data to identify which states should be supported with the limited funding that we have. So we’ve been using it to prioritize states for funding.”*

Steven Romalewski, the creator of the maps, was integrated into the planning of the initiative early on, an important difference from 2010 that Romalewski identifies as an important

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.censushardtocomaps2020.us/?latlng=40.00000%2C-98.09000&z=4&promotedfeaturetype=states&baselayerstate=3&rtrYear=sR2020latest&infotab=info-rtrselfresponse&filterQuery=false>

<sup>24</sup> <https://gwipp.gwu.edu/counting-dollars-2020-role-decennial-census-geographic-distribution-federal-funds>

factor in creating the readiness to respond to the numerous external challenges. Romalewski also provided analysis of the self-response patterns so “groups could refocus and redeploy resources locally on almost a real-time basis.” That “bird’s-eye view of the trends” was presented weekly in collaboration with Terri Ann Lowenthal and FCI. Romalewski also provided data and analysis for some of the litigation.

The “Counting for Dollars” project described the role of the census in the distribution of federal funds for each. The research was widely used in early state and federal advocacy to increase support and funding for the census. As one hub described, “It helped lawmakers understand how census data helped make federal funding decisions. He broke that down state by state so that was really useful data to have when you’re having Hill meetings.”

*“I think that the absolute key has been the resources and the information. Being steered to things like the CUNY Hard to Count map at the beginning. Sharing where to find census information itself, the deep and in-depth knowledge that has come out of the Collaborative. So we’ve been able to take, grow, and pass into our network and it’s been enormous.”*

– National Hub

## Technical Census Support

Technical support included expert consultants that provided deep content and technical knowledge to census stakeholders. Some, such as Terri Ann Lowenthal and Bill O’Hare, were part of the initiative from the start and were also part of the 2010 Census effort working with the Funders’ Census Initiative. Lowenthal was integrated throughout the various strategies and tables of the Collaborative and provided on-going guidance on all things census as well as congressional census oversight and appropriations. Jeri Green, Lowenthal, and O’Hare were a triumvirate of knowledge and understanding on Census Bureau operations that helped organizations navigate the changing census timeline caused by the pandemic. Lowenthal was also an invaluable resource to the Hill Strategy Group; O’Hare, working in collaboration with the Partnership for America’s Children, was central to elevating the undercount of young children to the Census Bureau; and Green led the National Urban League’s census work. National hubs frequently relied on them, and 74% rated the expert consulting support as very valuable.

*“Bill O’Hare is the national leader on the undercount, not only of young children but of many demographic communities. He was also a touch point for a lot of the organizations to talk about the undercount of Hispanic or undercount of Black communities. He’s the one who put the counting of young kids as a top priority in many people’s minds. He was a critical factor in everything we did because he helped us understand the data and understand why kids were missed. He was an important liaison for us with the Census Bureau. He also was an advisor to the Census Bureau around the count of young kids. He was a critical element in what we did.”*

**– National Hub**

Denice Ross, a data expert, helped lead the formation of the Census Quality Reinforcement Task Force (CQR). Her role and the emergence of the CQR exemplify the funder response to emerging needs. Ross was funded to support efforts on data quality, as it was becoming apparent that the pandemic and the politization of the census were impacting the ability to achieve a fair and accurate count. Data quality issues continued to be a challenge well after the enumeration ended, making the role of the CQR even more valuable.

## **Communications and Digital Support**

The coordinated media buys, digital audit, and digital trainings were the lowest rated of all the expert and technical supports. This rating does not necessarily reflect the value of these resources but rather that they were made available to a smaller subset of hubs.

Digital audits, provided by Do Big Things in 2019 to a small group of hubs, were intended to build the digital capacity of national organizations. Overall, most described it as helpful but had not fully implemented all the recommendations. One hub noted some of the recommendations were not aligned with the way they do their work, and another noted they did not have the resources to implement all the recommendations.

*“We knew that we needed to change that. We just don't have the resources to hire the capacity to do it. And digital is becoming even more expensive to hire people. But they were right on in terms of the report and what they gave us.”*

Tim Lim Consulting Services was a late entry into the initiative but provided support, training, TA, and coaching on communications, social media, and digital strategies. Lim played an important role in helping organizations pivot after the pandemic to paid ad, paid programming, digital programming, and texting. Trainings helped organizations transition to an online approach. Lim worked closely with the Census Counts Campaign and helped implement the Facebook ad grant program. The Facebook ads received praise for their reach but required a significant amount of technical capacity on the part of the organization. Even organizations with a communications department struggled to implement the ads and

needed to hire additional external support, and another hub worked with a communications consulting firm.

*“I thought working with Tim was really valuable. He designed and bought our ads, whether it was by radio or streaming music or SMS texting. Tim knew what our strategy was, knew where we needed to target it, and knew how to make the buys. I mean he basically was our ad agency, making the ad buys for us on a strategy that was designed specifically to reach those families. We did not have that expertise. If I had gone to just any ad company, they wouldn’t have understood the census issues.”*

– National Hub

## NATIONAL LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Most stakeholders described the national hub structure as a valuable and effective strategy; however, they suggested a more inclusive process driven by census stakeholders to select the hubs. **The national hub infrastructure allowed organizations to do what no single organization could have done alone.** As one hub described, *“We didn’t have enough funds or staff to do a huge campaign on our own, so it wouldn’t have been successful if it hadn’t been for the partnership of the organizations that got on board.”*

The national hubs formed a critical part of the national census infrastructure. Stakeholders provided feedback on the hubs, the variation across them, and how they were selected.

Hub organizations were of varying size and had varying census experience. This impacted their census engagement. One hub advised, *“Think more about who the hubs are and how big ones are different from medium-size ones, are different from small ones in terms of staffing level and budget level, and what you expect, what you want them to be able to accomplish.”*

Some stakeholders expressed concerns about how hubs were selected. Organizations suggested greater transparency in the selection process and the inclusion of census organizations in the process. One suggestion included using a committee of census organizations to select the hubs. They also suggested engaging in the process early on to avoid the addition of new hubs later in the process. One stakeholder noted, *“We want folks to be able to equitably and transparently apply for stuff, and if we were able to do it as a united front and not have it be so fraught early on, what could that have looked like.”*

Hubs focused on Black communities expressed feeling overlooked in the funding process and within the hub structure. The funding of some of these organizations later in the process contributed to this sentiment. The Subgroup had supported them to create the Black Census Roundtable, which by all accounts was successful, but because they felt less integrated into the hub structure, the Roundtable played a greater role. As a result, these organizations created what one stakeholder called a “parallel structure”:

*“We had two trains running. We had the one structure for the hubs, and then we had the real deal over here [the Black Roundtable]. Unfortunately, I don’t know if the hubs really had a good idea about what was really going on in our communities—like issues related to civil unrest—I don’t know if they got the whole picture at all times.”*

**– National Hub**

Additionally, a few organizations felt that the hub infrastructure was redundant and thought that existing infrastructure that national organizations already used to collaborate could have been more effectively utilized. He described it this way:

*“We’re in a million coalitions. Do a scan of all of the different coalitions and you’re probably going to get 90% of your national organizations and then empower them to be the hubs to carry out this work because they already have a relationship and infrastructure. If you’re going to leverage progressive infrastructure, use what’s already there. . . . So you’d probably still get your hub approach, but you wouldn’t be creating new hubs that may or may not be in competition.”*

As previously noted, new national hub organizations were funded as resources became available. The Subgroup’s fundraising efforts were on-going, and as a result, the funding and grantmaking strategy was often emergent and responsive. This created challenges for organizations that were newer to the Collaborative but is an important lesson learned for the next census.

- There was wide agreement across stakeholders that **more resources on the ground were needed**. The Subgroup implemented a mini-grants program that was very popular among the hubs despite the fact that it was time- and staff-intensive, and some hubs also sought other additional resources to regrant to support their affiliates’ census work. However, one hub described it as the “missing link” in the strategy. For example, the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation provided regranting resources to the Native American and Indigenous people hubs, which helped them support small organizations in tribal regions that would not have received funding otherwise. The need for on-the-ground resources was also magnified by the pandemic. Many hubs noted that they didn’t have the structure in place to regrant but thought some form of

regranting should be included in the 2030 Census. Several organizations suggested a hybrid approach—shared regranting or a hub-advised fund similar to a donor or community-advised fund where hubs could identify gaps and provide funding guidance, similar to how they helped inform the later stage of CEF grantmaking. While the Subgroup’s strategy to rely on state and local funders to support the work in their states and on the ground did engage more funders and funding, it did not seem to replace the need for regranting.

- **While Census Counts was widely praised, it did not fully achieve its goal of being a centralized census clearinghouse.** The Census Counts Campaign was viewed as a central lynchpin in the infrastructure and strategy, but the Campaign’s website was described by many stakeholders as difficult to navigate and find information. Consultants who worked with the Campaign provided two important recommendations: (1) the creation of a stronger centralized communications hub or communications director within the Campaign; and (2) having clear processes and platforms to share information and coordinate collective actions, including platforms to enable real-time communication.
- **Dedicating staff or hiring new staff to work on the census was a critical strategy for building organizational capacity to engage in the census campaign.** Both national and local organizations found having dedicated staff for the census was necessary because of the scope and intensity of the effort. “If it’s everybody’s job, it is nobody’s job,” said one Executive Director. Many national hubs noted that on-going funding for census work is a means to build on the existing investments and sustain the institutional capacity that has been built within organizations. However, state and local organizations with limited census resources frequently had to add census to their existing work, which became more challenging under pandemic conditions.
- **Stakeholders encouraged funders to build on their investment by supporting the census on on-going rather than cyclical basis.** Stakeholders applauded the significant and early investment the philanthropic community made in the 2020 Census. There was broad agreement across national, state, and local stakeholders that the capacity and relationships built as a result of this investment needs to be preserved: as one stakeholder said, “Don’t let the work we’ve done the past two and a half years go to waste. We have to build on what we’ve done because otherwise we’re just going to start from scratch in 2028, and we’re going to have to rebuild all these connections.”

Hub organizations and funders provided suggestions on how to maintain the infrastructure. In general, interviewees struggled to provide concrete suggestions, but they all expressed a belief that something important and powerful was built and desire to maintain it. Their feedback fell into two categories, those focused on the census and those focused more broadly on infrastructure.

Census-related recommendations stemmed from a new or reaffirmed understanding that census work is ongoing and not cyclical.

- Provide ongoing advocacy support for the census to include the 2030 Census, the ACS, budget advocacy and other operational and data issues. Support low touch engagement to keep organizations involved, updated, and interested.
- Maintain a smaller group of core organizations to work together on the census.

Broader Infrastructure recommendation pertained to the network that had been built, the new relationships catalyzed, and the successful collaboration facilitated. The census made real what a nationwide network of organizations with a shared goal could accomplish and there was a strong desire to sustain and utilize it for other issues including civic engagement and electoral work, advocacy for social justice issues equity around vaccine distribution, and implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

- Invest in civic engagement infrastructure on an ongoing rather than episodic basis This includes supporting national and state organizations but also being attentive to the on-the-ground organizations and organizing groups who engage communities. Continue to hold the Quarterly meetings or other meetings convened and managed by funders to encourage grantee participation. Organizations valued the ability to meet with a wide spectrum of stakeholders. This suggest that the approach of these meetings that brought together both funders and grantees was valued. It helped break down funder-grantee silos but also the issue silos that grantees and stakeholder often operate in. Organizations frequently reported meeting new people and organizations at this meeting.
- Maintain the Census Counts Campaign as the convener of the overall national infrastructure (not including the funders). The campaign was viewed as the “go-to” on census issues and some stakeholders wondered if it could not continue to play that role on other issues and connect and coordinate organizations. There are challenges with this suggestion because the Campaign is housed in Leadership Conference but what underlies this recommendation is the need for some type of coordinating table. One consultant even suggested the creation of a new 501(c)3 organization.

*“I wish funders would just invest in infrastructure year-round because when we have moments like this, moments like the citizenship question and the census, you want to call on those people that you have invested in, especially in the Midwest and the South, and we as a progressive movement never have a plan for how we’re going to invest in the states long term. It’s almost a waste of resources, a waste of capacity not to continue to build on that when the infrastructure in those places is so critically needed.”*

**– National Hub**

# State and Local Infrastructure

The Subgroup's GOTC plan included support to "enable trusted voices, especially local community-based organizations,"<sup>25</sup> in recognition that these on-the-ground organizations were critical to reaching historically undercounted populations. The Subgroup provided funding to state "hubs" or state intermediaries, particularly in large states, so that, by leveraging the census resources provided by the national hubs, the state hubs would facilitate GOTC planning, tailor materials and messages, provide training and communications support, and maximize coverage across their state. This structure was also intended to catalyze the support of state and local foundations. The infrastructure that was being funded on the national level was serving as a means to attract funding support within states by providing something to connect to and coordinate with.

However, while some states like California had a well-developed infrastructure and a strong state hub that formed a statewide census coalition, not all states had sufficient infrastructure or philanthropic presence and resources. The Subgroup created the Census Equity Fund (CEF) as a pooled fund to help address the unevenness across the states, particularly those with large historically undercounted populations.

The CEF resources were intended to (a) support the work of organizations in these states and encourage collaboration and coordination among organizations to conduct a comprehensive and coordinated outreach campaign, and (b) catalyze funding on the state and local level through a match requirement.<sup>26</sup> The CEF was implemented in multiple evolving phases and extended beyond the original plan because of successful fundraising. At the start, the CEF used an open RFP process, which evolved into a more targeted by-invitation RFP process. In response to the pandemic, a subcommittee of census stakeholders was created to prioritize emergency funding targeted at regions with low self-response rates. The CEF relied on input from funders and stakeholders on the subcommittee and in each state to inform its grantmaking decisions.

In addition to the CEF, the state and local infrastructure was comprised of the affiliates and partners of national hub organizations and members of the States Count Action Network (S-CAN). The S-CAN, formerly known as the Kitchen Cabinet, was comprised of state-level and other organizations. The Kitchen Cabinet was reconceived once the Census Counts Campaign was created to be S-CAN and was co-led by the Census Counts Campaign and State Voices since many of the State Voices' tables were so active in the census. The S-CAN became a network of over 1000 organizations across 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico,

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<sup>25</sup> Get Out the Count 2020: An Implementation Plan. February 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Census Equity Fund RFP, February 2019.

where members could access all the national census resources through the Census Counts Campaign and find a table for on-going, two-way flow of information. Collectively, the organizations in CEF, the national hub affiliates and partners, and the S-CAN network formed the state infrastructure that connected to the national hubs.

To assess GOTC efforts and how state and local organizations utilized and benefited from the supports provided by the Collaborative, we surveyed CEF grantees S-CAN members and national hub affiliates and interviewed some key stakeholders. ORS Impact's reports on census supports across the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico provides more details of the state infrastructures built.<sup>27</sup>

Below are some high-level findings, which we will describe later in more detail:<sup>28</sup>

- The Collaborative strengthened the local and state civic engagement infrastructure for GOTC work; through the national hub network and other centralized national infrastructure opportunities, it provided resources, materials, and guidance and facilitated local engagement tables for strategy development and collaboration between census stakeholders.
- CEF grantees and other local organizations connected to the national census infrastructure by partnering with national hubs and with local and state organizations that were also supported by the Collaborative.
- CEF grantees and other local organizations leveraged and built expertise where necessary, and the Collaborative helped strengthen existing partnerships and create new ones.
- COVID-19 was the biggest challenge faced by CEF grantees and other local census advocates. CEF grantees and other organizations were most challenged by the inability to do public outreach and events and by the cancellation of door-to-door strategies. The Collaborative's support helped organizations pivot their strategies to respond to these challenges.

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<sup>27</sup> ORS Impact produced a separate report describing how funders and organizations in each of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico worked to support the 2020 Census. This report contains an overall estimate of the total amount of private and public funding available in aggregate and per state. The report is available to the public in the FCI website: <https://funderscommittee.org/learning-evaluations/>

<sup>28</sup> This evaluation focused on the CEF and the S-CAN. We also included some findings on national hub affiliates, but most of the detailed information was shared directly with each national hub for their internal learning. Reports on individual states area available through the FCI website.

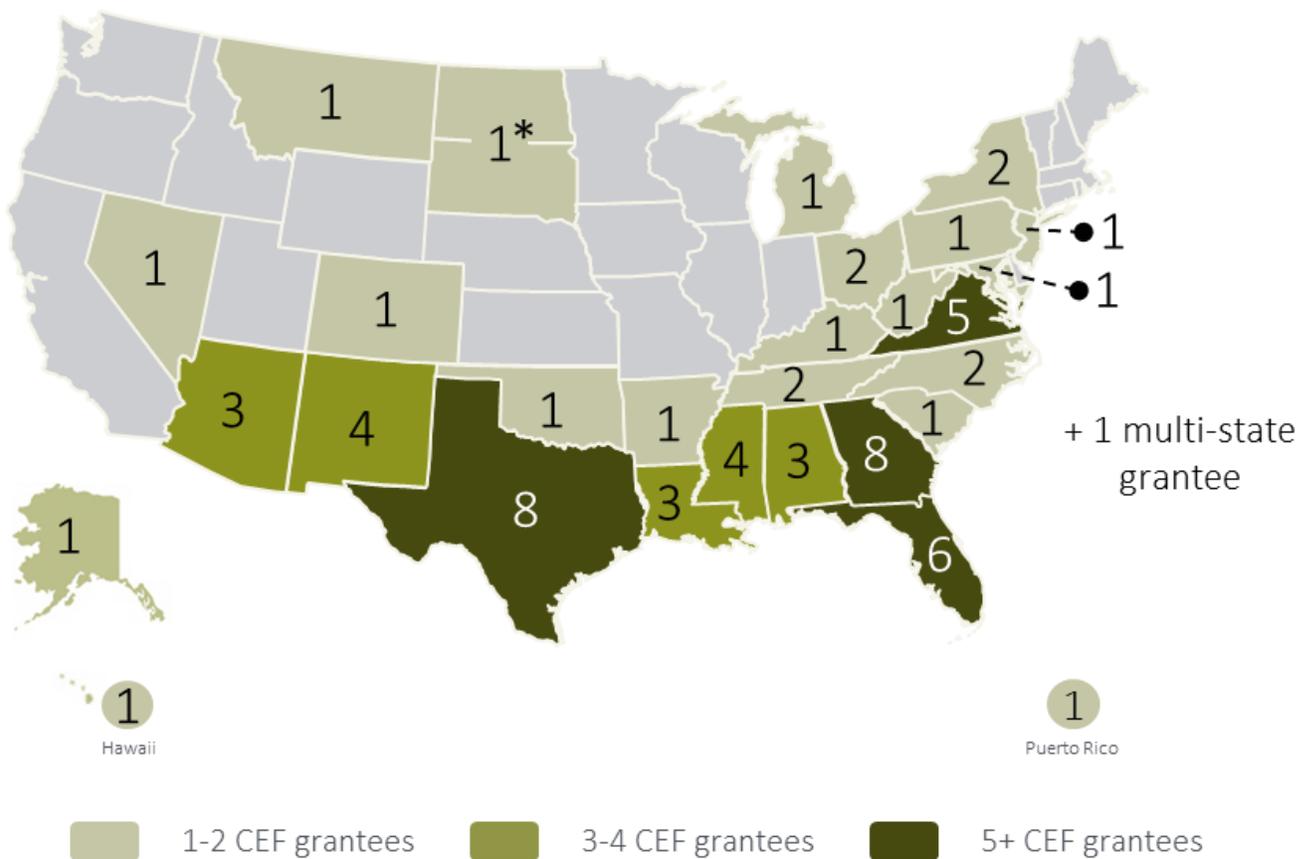
## CENSUS EQUITY FUND

The CEF was the main strategy through which the Census Subgroup supported GOTC efforts in priority states. Altogether \$13.7 million (12% of total Subgroup grantmaking) was allocated to 69 grantees across 28 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The CEF’s goal was to support state and regional outreach efforts through grants in areas with:

- Limited government and philanthropic funding
- High proportions of historically undercounted populations

Figure 11 shows the breath of CEF funding across the country.

Figure 11 | Map of CEF Grantees



\* One grantee organization was funded to work in North and South Dakota.

The Subgroup designed the CEF so that through funding and other supports, CEF grantees could:

- Conduct outreach through their existing networks to promote census participation
- Create or expand their plan for GOTC within the state or designated geographic area of focus
- Create and strengthen partnerships with others in their states and communities (e.g., faith-based groups, libraries, public schools, public agencies, service providers, and local businesses) to encourage census participation
- Utilize a range of outreach strategies, including door-to-door outreach and events (pre-pandemic), texting, social media, radio ads, phone-banking, partnerships with service providers, and other available strategies
- Develop best practices, materials, resources, toolkits, and other resources to support GOTC or leverage such resources from the national hubs or other state-based and local groups to strengthen their GOTC work and better target their efforts
- Leverage or attract local funding to support the census

We surveyed the funded organizations to learn about the GOTC work within the CEF states and the extent to which they leveraged the resources made available through the Collaborative and how these resources were helpful, if at all; Below we provide some key findings.

**Most CEF grantees both leveraged and built the expertise and skills needed to conduct their GOTC work and CEF funding helped them deepen and broaden their outreach work.**

A majority of grantees were organizing and civic engagement groups that reported having strong organizing skills, which they leveraged in their GOTC work. This is not surprising because the organizations that are trusted in community and have close and on-going contact with communities are usually grassroots organizing groups. Nearly all grantees reported leveraging their existing expertise, and at least half reported leveraging their ability to build and manage outreach lists (67%), utilize their cultural competence (60%), and identify, convene, and collaborate with a diverse group of actors (56%)—all important for organizing and electoral work. And where organizations couldn't leverage skills, they built them—specifically related to census work. Grantees reported building their subject matter census expertise (83%), their ability to advocate for a fair and accurate census count (62%),

and to implement digital communications strategies (48%). Digital communications proved to be especially important, and their digital need intensified as 2020 progressed because of the need for virtual GOTC work as a result of the pandemic. Grantees appreciated learning about how to use technology in new ways, integrating census outreach into other activities, and developing a digital communications strategy.

Nearly all grantees found the CEF valuable for enabling them to do their GOTC work and to expand their outreach work. It allowed them to reach more people than they would have otherwise been able to reach (65%) through trusted messengers and other strategies, and to regrant resources to local organizations, counties, tribal groups, and other census partners (58%). CEF grantees were seen as the local outreach experts and were able to increase their impact by broadening their outreach work and leveraging their partnerships with communities and other stakeholders.

**CEF grantees connected to the national census infrastructure through their partnerships with national hubs and used the resources the Collaborative provided; Census Count Campaign resources and the CUNY map were the most helpful supports for their GOTC work.**

In addition to funding, the Subgroup hoped to connect grantees with other organizations, including national hubs and S-CAN, to leverage their resources and share information and learning. The intent was to provide and connect organizations on the ground with sufficient resources and information to support their culturally appropriate outreach efforts and promote innovation. The national hubs provided a foundation of census information and resources for state and local organizations to build from. On average, grantees reported being connected to four national hubs. They reported working mostly with national hubs focused on civic engagement and civil rights—Census Counts Campaign, Leadership Conference Education Fund, and State Voices—as well as NALEO, focused on Latinx communities.

In addition to the national hubs, Census Counts Campaign and the pool of consultants and census experts provided resources and supports. Grantees were encouraged to utilize these resources and tools, which helped refine, improve, and adjust their GOTC strategies in response to census challenges. Like the hubs, most grantees found the CUNY Hard to Count map and Census Counts Campaign and national hub resources valuable for messaging and communications guidance. According to a key informant, the CUNY map was helpful:

*“[It could] layer on lots of information like where were the libraries, before the pandemic . . . [they] were able to map on where children were. . . . It was very helpful for groups on the ground to figure out where to target.”*

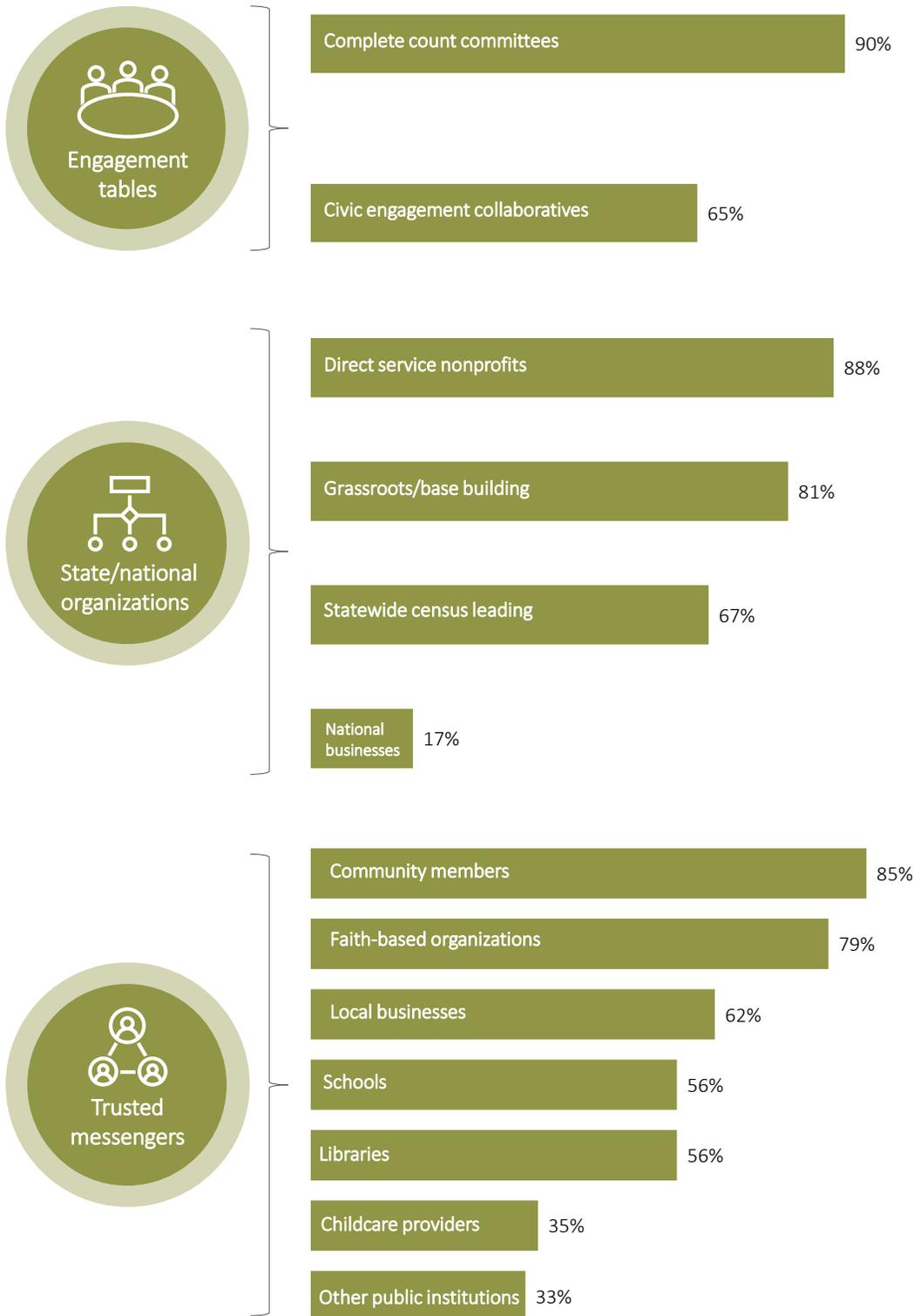
**– Key Informant**

Messaging guidance was essential for GOTC work, considering the many gaps that existed with cultural appropriateness and resonance in different communities. Grantees also reported being able to pivot their GOTC strategies as a result of these resources; 71% said that it allowed them to modify their strategies and either use or adapt GOTC materials. They also reported being able to add new methods to their strategies.

**CEF grantees worked with a diverse group of partners on the ground. They worked most closely with Complete Count Committees, community and base-building organizations, and trusted messengers.**

The complexity and scale of census efforts necessitated collaboration between a diverse group of census stakeholders. By working together, strategies could be fine-tuned, best practices could be shared, and new partnerships could widen existing networks to improve outreach and impact. While grantees leveraged many of their existing partnerships, coalitions, and networks in their GOTC work, engaging with funders and organizations in the Collaborative helped strengthen and diversify these relationships. Grantees reported working with a broad spectrum of stakeholders through engagement tables and with local/state/national organizations, trusted messengers, government agencies, philanthropy, media outlets, and census experts. A majority (90%) worked the closest with Complete Count Committees, direct-service organizations (88%), and community members (85%) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13 | Overview of CEF Grantee's Closest GOTC Partnerships



## The CEF grantmaking process was responsive to emerging census needs and targeted funding where it was most needed.

The CEF was an effective strategy for targeting funding to states that needed it most and was responsive in volatile times. It identified useful criteria for effective grantmaking and engaged local funders across the country who offered funds and provided a local perspective on where funds should go. The CEF's approach was also appealing to funders. The pooled fund allowed funders to support the census and to target their funding to areas of greatest need without having to do the leg work themselves. Some funders only supported the CEF, others supported both the national pooled fund and CEF, and others only supported the pooled fund which also underwrote the cost of CEF. The CEF provided funders the means to directly support GOTC on the ground, and other funders saw it as an opportunity to support the development of civic engagement infrastructure that could be leveraged beyond the census.

The grantmaking process was designed to work fast and respond to needs. According to a key stakeholder, the CEF subcommittee *“allowed [them] to work pretty rapidly and in a streamlined way in terms of reviewing proposals, but then [they] would engage the fuller Subgroup in terms of decision making.”*

Grantmaking occurred in multiple cycles as new funds were raised and more state needs were identified. Some funding was intentionally reserved for emergency response in areas with low response rates, which became more relevant with the pandemic. While the strategy was responsive and adaptive to state needs, there was also the challenge of providing organizations with funding in cycles instead of all at once and at the beginning. This made it difficult for organizations to plan ahead and develop skills and expertise at the beginning of their census work versus while it was already under way.

## THE STATES COUNT ACTION NETWORK

S-CAN was a key strategy under the Census Counts Campaign and was led by Diali Avila from The Leadership Conference and Elena Langworthy from State Voices. S-CAN was promoted among GOTC organizations regardless of their connection to the Subgroup and funding status and eventually grew to over 1000 members. CEF grantees and national hubs were encouraged to connect with S-CAN. The goal of participating in this network was to increase the state and local hub network capacity for GOTC (knowledge, digital and other skills, resources), share information across the states, and keep organizations apprised of changes in Census Bureau operations and advocacy activities.

We surveyed 105 organizations that participated in the S-CAN network to learn about their GOTC work and the value and benefits of participating in this network. We also sought to learn about the census challenges that organizations faced and the degree to which they partnered with national hubs. More than half of the surveyed organizations were newer to census work, and more of them were advocacy and civic engagement organizations. **Overall, organizations reported valuing their participation in the S-CAN.** Following are high-level findings to explain how and to what extent organizations' GOTC efforts benefited from the S-CAN.

**Organizations, most notably, relied on S-CAN to keep them up to date on emerging census news and resources to improve their GOTC work, all of which helped them adjust their GOTC strategies in response to census challenges.**

The S-CAN provided organizations with opportunities to collaborate and stay informed on census developments, timeline shifts, and challenges. Through the network, the Census Counts Campaign disseminated information through a listserv; provided consultation opportunities to stakeholders with the Census Counts Campaign, The Leadership Conference, and State Voices; and facilitated regional and national calls. Regular calls were scheduled and during the pandemic, served as a one-stop-shop for information on Census Bureau operations, information sharing, message alignment, and joint action planning. Participating organizations engaged most frequently with the S-CAN through its listserv. They occasionally attended regional and national calls, and more than half valued consultation opportunities.

More specifically, most organizations valued learning about Census Bureau operations, design, and timeline (89%), and the wide range of resources available that allowed them to pivot their strategies as needed. Organizations reported valuing messaging and communications guidance (81%), GOTC toolkits (71%), George Washington University's Counting for Dollars fact sheets (70%), and other resources from the Census Counts Campaign. They also valued the CUNY map, inoculation trainings, self-response analysis webinars, campaign websites, and convenings, including the funder-sponsored national quarterly meetings. These supports allowed organizations to stay responsive to census changes and shifts and learn about ways to pivot their GOTC strategies and tactics to respond to challenges (77%). In fact, about half of organizations reported being able to make adjustments to their organization's goals and strategies based on learnings from their S-CAN engagement by adding tactics to (48%) and modifying their GOTC strategies (39%).

## Organizations were able to connect to the national census infrastructure by partnering with civic engagement and civil rights national hubs.

Like CEF grantees, S-CAN members appreciated connecting to national hubs to leverage their census experience and expertise. Over half of organizations reported valuing building relationships with national organizations (55%), and they mostly partnered with civic engagement and civil rights national hubs. The top national hubs that provided both *direct* (i.e., training, TA, GOTC collaboration on the ground) and *indirect* (i.e., census-related information/toolkits, census resources/materials) support to organizations that participated in S-CAN were Census Counts Campaign, State Voices, and NALEO, which is no surprise considering the Census Counts Campaign and State Voices provided S-CAN leadership, and S-CAN also included the State Voices tables.

## NATIONAL HUB AFFILIATES

National hub affiliates were another critical piece of the national and local census infrastructure puzzle. They received support from national hubs for their GOTC work and invested skills and expertise into communities across the country so that local and state organizations could be better prepared for GOTC work. To learn about the work of affiliates and value added of the Collaborative, we surveyed the “affiliates” of 10 national hubs, hearing from 378 organizations who were meant to be supported by national hubs and the national infrastructure, less than half who were newer to census work. Affiliates’ work was strengthened by the Collaborative, and below we describe how they benefited.

## Affiliates leveraged their organizing skills and built census-specific knowledge for their GOTC work and to support other local efforts.

Affiliates benefited from their own local experience and access to national expertise, skills, and resources of national hubs. Through their local work, communities, and partnerships, affiliates were well positioned to carry out effective GOTC work and, as previously mentioned, feed information and knowledge back up to national hub organizations. More than half leveraged their organizing and local experience, including their cultural competency expertise, connections with local government, and ability to collaborate with diverse groups of actors. In addition, these organizations also built expertise that was directly related to

census work, improving their subject matter expertise in the census (65%) and their ability to advocate and work with the Census Bureau to ensure a fair and accurate census (46%). By building and leveraging skills, affiliates were more effective in implementing and supporting GOTC work. Some of the skills they built through the census may be used to support future civic engagement and advocacy work beyond the census.

### Affiliates partnered with different national hubs and used the resources they provided.

Affiliates utilized the resources they received from their national hub organization. Affiliates reported the following resources as most valuable to their census work (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 | Affiliate’s Most Valued Collaborative Resources



As expected, almost all affiliates partnered with their parent national hub, but some also partnered with other national hubs, particularly with Community Action Partnership (CAP) and NALEO. This is not surprising because NALEO had a large and wide-reaching campaign for the Latinx community, and CAP is an association of community action agencies and other entities providing services to low-income people. This reflects the cross-cutting reach of some of the national hubs to organizations on the ground and is an example of a positive redundancy. The presence of the wide range of national hubs provided their affiliates as well as other state and local organizations multiple resources to tap into. One state coalition and

affiliate described how she connected to FIRM for immigrant specific resources, NALEO for broader Latinx campaign materials, and the Census Counts Campaign for more general census information and updates.

## STATE AND LOCAL LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **More on-the-ground in-person organizing in conjunction with digital/relational organizing is needed to reach historically undercounted populations.** The pandemic was a major obstacle to in-person organizing, particularly in the early stages of the GOTC. Some organizations noted that starting digital organizing earlier in the process would have been beneficial, as would more contingency planning. By the late summer of 2020, some organizations reported holding “COVID-safe” in-person events and door knocking. Other organizations were combining their census outreach with their electoral organizing. Organizations emphasized the importance of using trusted local messengers as well as building relationships with community members prior to campaigns to be able to mobilize them on issues such as the census.
- **State infrastructure was lacking in many of the CEF states; many stakeholders urge an on-going focus on state-level infrastructure building.** The CEF helped to catalyze census collaboration within selected states. Organizations found the collaboration to be helpful and noted that more on-going collaboration along with improving coordination between government, business, and nonprofits would be useful. They emphasized the need for on-going funding to support state-level infrastructure. Many organizations described how they used the census as an opportunity to build community power; others also noted the importance of state infrastructure for building long-term power.

CEF grantees were not alone in identifying the need for state-level infrastructure; national organizations and funders also saw the census as an opportunity to support state infrastructure building and as an important on-going activity. Several national hubs described how the census helped build infrastructure on a local and state level that was leveraged for Get Out the Vote (GOTV) and attributed upticks in voter turnout, in part, to the census infrastructure that had been built:

*“We built a lot of muscles in groups, some folks who hadn’t worked together before, some who had, to really impact change or affect change, and now I think utilize that infrastructure to support other priorities that they may have.”*

*– National Hub*

- **Support state-level census work sooner.** Both state and national organizations said that state-level census work should begin earlier and include several key activities: state-level budget advocacy, engagement in the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) process, and support in establishing Complete Counts Committees. In addition, funders noted that earlier and increased funding should support stronger state and regional strategies and address problems in the Master Address File. While the CEF was widely praised as a strategy, several national organizations as well as CEF grantees thought that more funding resources should have gone to the state and local census work.

# Digital Support for GOTC

The Subgroup invested in digital outreach supports early on, recognizing their importance as potentially effective outreach strategies in the current cultural context. Borrowing from digital outreach experiences in other civic engagement efforts, funders hoped to leverage tools to bolster GOTC ground campaigns. There were two main types of digital efforts:<sup>29</sup>

- 1. Capacity building:** Supports to build capacity among organizations conducting GOTC efforts included but were not limited to a digital “audit” of seven national hubs, a “Digital Academy” and Digital U containing resources like videos and webinars on how to engage in digital outreach, and office hours to consult with digital communications experts.
- 2. Digital outreach:** The Subgroup also invested in a few efforts to identify and directly reach historically undercounted populations or research promising methods to do so. These efforts included but were not limited to texting campaigns, Facebook ad campaigns, and grants recommended through the C-DOG for promising apps or digital tools to identify and engage historically undercounted populations.

The hope was that through the supports provided, organizations would be able to select and use the digital tools needed for their outreach work, build their internal digital capacity, or leverage their existing digital expertise when necessary. These supports became even more relevant and important as the COVID-19 pandemic forced local, state, and national groups to rely on digital strategies like never before: neither enumerators nor organizers could go door-to-door, in-person community events were cancelled, and canvassing was now virtual. These, along with a slew of other census challenges, made on-the-ground work challenging and digital outreach ever more important.

The evaluation did not specifically seek to assess the effectiveness of digital supports; however, data collection about digital efforts focused on capacity-building resources and were embedded within surveys and interviews. We leveraged secondary data and key informant interviews to learn about digital outreach efforts.

## A note on terminology

**Digital Outreach:** using digital tools, data, platforms, and practices to identify, inform, engage, and mobilize people to take action, in this case, complete the 2020 Census. We separate digital outreach from other communications strategies like internal communications, and earned and paid media in traditional channels. Broader communications efforts are outside of our scope; therefore, this section focuses on digital outreach.

<sup>29</sup> There were other communications efforts like misinformation/disinformation work, or grants to track the Census Bureau’s digital work that are not included within the scope of this evaluation.

Adapting to digital outreach was a significant challenge for GOTC organizations, and some were more prepared for this challenge than others; nevertheless, the resources developed by the Collaborative to build digital capacity were the least helpful compared to other resources. A few factors might help explain why that was the case.

Organizations at all levels reported that pivoting to digital outreach was a significant challenge; however, 70% of national hubs reported this pivot as a challenge compared to one third of state CEF organizations. As part of the strategies to support GOTC efforts, the Collaborative developed and provided a set of digital resources for stakeholders to leverage. Across national hubs and CEF organizations, these resources were generally the least valuable compared to other resources the Collaborative provided. Specifically, only around half of national hubs found the digital outreach training and coaching (53%) helpful. Moreover, we received mixed qualitative feedback about the value of Do Big Things' digital audits, which were designed to assess and offer recommendations to improve seven national hubs' digital capacity; this resource seemed helpful for some but not for others, and the extent to which they were able to implement recommendations varied according to capacity, bandwidth, and available resources. Similarly, small proportions of CEF grantees found digital resources valuable. Among resources available to the full cohort, the highest rated items were technical assistance in designing and implementing digital outreach (15%) and digital training webinars (12%); However, around half of CEF grantees did not access these resources. Ultimately, 57% of national hubs built skills around facilitating virtual events while half (48%) of CEF grantees reported building their digital capacity.

Our data collection suggests that a few factors may be contributing to the lower ratings for digital resources:

- 1.** Many organizations were leveraging existing digital skills, so capacity building might not have been as necessary, even if it was challenging. At the same time, 60% of national hubs reported leveraging existing digital capacities, compared to 46% of CEF organizations; even where capacity building was necessary, there was likely variability in how much and what kind of capacity building was helpful for organizations.
- 2.** There were likely opportunities to improve dissemination of resources and opportunities, as many of the surveyed organizations did not access and/or did not know about the digital resources available to them, particularly among state organizations. We expand on this point in the following section.<sup>30</sup> Digital efforts had

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<sup>30</sup> Some resources, like webinars, were open to the public and not specifically targeted to the surveyed organizations.

their limits, particularly with historically undercounted populations. Many organizations continued to hold in-person activities, which they perceived as more effective within their target populations.

3. As with other capacity-building efforts, digital capacity is specific to organizations' context, so many might not have found the level or type of information provided as useful to their specific needs.

## Secondary data point to variable results for texting efforts and research into promising digital outreach practices.

While we did not collect data specifically about digital outreach efforts, secondary data and key informant interviews, specifically about the Collaborative's texting campaigns and the Census Digital Organizing Group's (C-DOG) pilot grants, provided an overview of their development and results.

### Texting Campaigns

The Census Outreach Expansion texting campaign<sup>31</sup> developed in partnership with The Leadership Conference, State Voices, CEF organizations, and NALEO is another digital outreach campaign, which reached over 9 million historically undercounted individuals in 17 states through more than 100 local organizations' efforts. In addition to scaling outreach efforts by reaching millions of people quickly, the texting campaign worked well for most participating organizations, and it built civic engagement capacity among organizations and volunteers. About two thirds of participating organizations reported a positive experience with this process and said it increased their digital capacity. Moreover, almost three fourths of them had never participated in a similar process and reported they would do so again in the future. From those who participated in the texting campaign, 72% of texters reported that they had personally provided information to people that resulted in them being able to participate in the census or the election when they might have otherwise not done so.<sup>32</sup>

However, one third of participating organizations did not have a positive experience, so there are opportunities to learn from the experience and improve the model. Key informants

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<sup>31</sup> There was a second texting campaign, but we do not have comparable data to the COE data reported here.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, S.. *2020 COE mobile outreach results*.

suggest that challenges with this campaign stem from the top-down nature of the initiative, where national funders and organizations provided this opportunity to local organizations without asking for input on whether and what would be useful. While in some states this campaign could have been a great asset, in at least one state, this resulted in duplication of efforts, as local organizations had already engaged in texting and phone banking on their own, and messages felt duplicative of prior efforts, which hindered the organizations' ability to move the needle on outreach. Moreover, the pace with which the campaign was implemented was burdensome to local organizations' staff, who already had a full plate with other GOTC efforts.

## Digital Research Grants

In an early effort to explore digital outreach mechanisms, the Subgroup created the C-DOG to identify and advance best practices for building capacity and using digital tools to encourage historically undercounted populations to complete the 2020 Census. Following C-DOG's recommendations, the Subgroup made 11 grants in 2019 to learn more about how digital tools could help with content distribution, relationship-driven outreach, and identifying historically undercounted populations. While some grantees covered more than one topic, eight focused mainly on content distribution and relational outreach, and three on identifying historically undercounted populations since there was no readily available list of these populations.

Key informant interviews suggest that some of these research grants were fruitful in adapting digital strategies to census work and to civic engagement more broadly. However, dissemination challenges hindered C-DOG's ability to share these learnings efficiently and effectively, which limited expansion and uptake of identified promising practices by other organizations.

*"A number of the pilots showed success; They showed that tactic or practice X works. What I don't think was done as effectively was dissemination and lesson capture to get as many people on board with that. I think more investment in dissemination would have been helpful."*

**– Key Informant**

There is likely a sweet spot between decentralized and centralized digital and communications work. The decentralized nature of digital work allowed for innovation and adaptation but resulted in dissemination and duplication challenges; a more centralized approach could help mitigate some of these issues but would present different challenges.

The Subgroup's overall approach to digital efforts and communication more generally was largely decentralized. National hubs and state organizations were encouraged to partner in the development of materials and digital effort. However, while some adaptation did occur, data suggests that there were still duplication issues.

*"I don't know how many of the national grantees did toolkits but I had to look at all of them . . . All of these grantees were doing their own thing . . . when it came to producing materials and resources, there was a lot of duplication."*

**– Key Informant**

In addition, many organizations did not access and/or did not know about the digital resources available to them, particularly among state organizations, pointing to information dissemination issues. This was also evident, as described previously, with C-DOG's early research efforts around applying civic engagement mechanisms to census outreach, which yielded some promising results. However, further uptake among other organizations was limited by the committee's challenges in sharing lessons learned in a timely and actionable way. At the time, communication channels like S-CAN had not been set up.

In response to these challenges, key informants identified engaging communications experts much earlier in the process as one of the main changes they would make in their approach. Developing a more centralized approach to communications could help mitigate duplication of efforts and materials. However, a centralized strategy could hinder innovation and adaptability to a wide variety of populations and contexts, pointing to a potential middle ground solution to reap the benefits of both approaches. In addition, a centralized strategy would still require significant support to be effective. For example, the communications team that was eventually engaged by the Collaborative tried to develop a resource hub later in the process, but technical challenges and a lack of a centralized home for knowledge management hindered their ability to make it widely available to the network.

# Policy Improvements

Census advocacy is an on-going process involving year in and year out monitoring of Census Bureau operations and planning for the American Community Survey (ACS) and the decennial census, advocating to congressional committees and legislative leaders to perform their census oversight function, defending against the raiding of the census budget, and advocating for sufficient appropriations to fully implement Census Bureau operations and surveys. Census advocacy laid the groundwork for the 2020 Census, and it continued throughout its implementation to support sufficient funding through the appropriations process and all legislative funding vehicles. Census advocacy was also critical in removing the citizenship question from the census and defending against the on-going attempts to exclude immigrants from the count. The impact of the pandemic on the census also necessitated on-going advocacy on various operational issues, including funding and the census timeline.

Advocacy was also an important part of the funder's Plan of Action, with funding primarily focused at the federal level, but early funding was also provided to organizations in key states to advocate for state funding for the census.

While this evaluation does not document the full breadth of census advocacy activities nor robustly evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy broadly, two case studies on census appropriations and the citizenship question were developed to provide insight into the nature of the advocacy, the strategies used, and the challenges faced. Throughout our data collection process, we also found that partners in the work wanted to talk about the on-going advocacy that was done, which allowed us to provide key findings on what facilitated successful advocacy based on the reflections of hub partners and other key informants.

**A core group of national organizations led the census advocacy; their existing relationships, coalitions, and tables formed the basis of their collaboration and contributed to their success.**

Many of the organizations that formed the core of the national infrastructure were also the same organizations that regularly engaged and led the federal census advocacy. These core organizations included The Leadership Conference, NALEO Educational Fund (NALEO), Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, and the National Urban League. These groups had long-standing relationships, and many of them were part of The Leadership Conference's Census Taskforce, cochaired by NALEO and AAJC. The Taskforce and later the Census Counts Campaign played important roles in creating tables for advocacy strategy coordination and collaboration over the decade and during the 2020 Census which included the formation of a

Hill Strategy Group. The Census Taskforce enabled *The* Leadership Conference to ramp up advocacy activities and to create the Hill Strategy Group.

This Hill Strategy Group played an important infrastructure role for the advocacy. It created a centralized table that coordinated the numerous tactics, and constituencies around a shared strategy. As one member described,

*“As organizations, we have different mandates, but it’s been very beneficial. Even though I know weekly calls are weekly calls, it’s still very beneficial for purposes of coordinating messages, sharing information, communicating uniform messages, and developing consensus when we can.”*

*– Hill strategy member*

The Leadership Conference convened weekly meetings of this Hill group to share information, strategize, and identify and implement action steps, particularly around the appropriations advocacy. The group also included the Census Project, a non-partisan diverse network of organizations focused on supporting funding for the decennial census, the American Community Survey, and the Census Bureau, and ensuring the integrity of census data; Akin Gump Strauss Hauer, a D.C.-based law firm; and Council for a Strong America, a national organization that engages business, law enforcement, military, and faith and sports leaders in policy that improves the lives of children. This small and efficient team leveraged their networks and congressional relationships to develop and coordinate a collective and targeted strategy that reached across the aisle to both Democrats and Republicans.

Approximately 26 lawsuits were filed on a range of topics, including the citizenship question, census timeline, the executive order on citizenship data, the executive memorandum on excluding immigrants from the apportionment data, census funding, the residency rule, and legal filings under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to compel the production of records. The Leadership Conference and the Census Counts Campaign also played a central role in bridging the advocates and organizers with the litigators, especially around the citizenship question. The national infrastructure allowed the litigation to be embedded in the overarching strategy that helped litigators identify plaintiffs and connect advocacy strategies to the litigation. A litigation table was established through the Brennan Center for Justice and the Leadership Conference to coordinate the amicus briefs for the numerous lawsuits. This table facilitated information across the eight citizenship question cases. One of the litigators commented on the value add of the infrastructure created through The Leadership Conference and the Brennan Center.

*"The structure was incredibly helpful and really allowed all of us to get what we needed in an efficient way. That was a really good learning lesson. The Leadership Conference Task Force structure definitely helped with that and as an outside third party who is not going to litigate. It was really important because we did not have two or three years to build that infrastructure."*

**– Key Informant**

The on-going nature and scope of the advocacy was at times overwhelming but was facilitated and supported by existing and newly formed tables. The fact that advocates have maintained the Hill Team is a testament to its efficacy and ability to translate collaboration and decision making into coordinated action.

**Reaching across the aisle to Republican and Democratic legislative leaders and working with the business sector were important to the success of the advocacy strategy.**

The census is a bipartisan issue because it impacts federal resources that go to states and impacts the apportionment of representation in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College. The census is also an important data source for the business sector, providing critical information about customers, the workforce, and the economic landscape.

Many of the hubs represented civil rights groups and more progressive segments. A few organizations helped to bolster stakeholder outreach and meet the need to reach conservative policymakers to soften any opposition and create a bipartisan approach. These included Council for a Strong America, Akin Gump, and the Census Project.

Akin Gump was widely praised for their ability to reach both Democrats and Republicans and the business sector. Given the civil rights community had good access to Democrats, Akin Gump became an important player in outreach to Republicans. Their team was led by the former chiefs of staff of Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT). They were described by one census advocate as, "a very formidable team, very savvy political strategists and that was really critical." Their team also included the former policy director at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), which gave them important connections to tribes and senators in states with large tribal populations. NCAI, also a national hub for Native American populations, was an important advocate that had bipartisan reach, unlike many of the other civil rights organizations.

The Census Project was also able to engage a wider set of stakeholders, such as Service Employees International Union (SEIU), National Statistical Association, National League of

Cities, National Association of Counties, National Association of Homebuilders, National Association of Realtors, and others.

Council for a Strong America was able to leverage its ties to Republican lawmaker in DC and the states. ReadyNation, a project of Council for a Strong America, served as the national census hub for business. Feedback on the business outreach was mixed. One of the challenges ReadyNation faced was the perception of the census as a “hot button” issue that coincided with discussions with the administration on tariffs and trade deals. Business leaders feared engagement on the census would endanger those discussions and the relationship with the administration. Some business owners and leaders also viewed the census as an immigration issue because of the citizenship question and therefore, did not want to get involved.

**Inside–outside strategies were made possible because of the presence of both a core groups of census experts and advocates and the networks of state and local organizations that could be mobilized to demonstrate power and influence.**

Much of census advocacy is “inside baseball,” requiring a deep understanding of the Bureau, its operations, the ACS and decennial census, the appropriations process, and the congressional committees that provide oversight on the census, as well as congressional advocacy and administrative advocacy to the Census Bureau.

National organizations and their partners had extensive federal policy advocacy experience and census expertise. Over the years, they had also cultivated relationships with key congressional staff members. As one advocate described,

*“The dogged advocacy, year in and year out, was really key and important because those relationships were already built. A lot of the staffers are already well versed in the census. It’s just trying to get their bosses on board and seeing it as a priority and making sure that happens. The existence of that tightknit group that was already doing a lot of this work on these issues was really critical in making sure that the monies were there and that the champions were there to help push and make that actually happen.”*

Administrative advocacy is different than legislative advocacy, with a different approach and skill set for success. It often relies on greater subject matter expertise and requires understanding of the system and relationships with bureaucrats. Advocates had formal relationships with the Census Bureau through their appointments to various bodies that

advise the agency—the National Advisory Committee (NAC) for the Census Bureau and the Census Scientific Advisory Committee (C-SAC)—and they relied on informal and long-standing relationships with career Census Bureau employees. Expert census consultants included Terri Ann Lowenthal, Jeri Green, William O’Hare, and Steve Jost, a consultant who worked in the Census Bureau and has experience on legislative matters related to the census. These experts<sup>33</sup> all played important roles in helping advocates navigate the Bureau and the appropriations process and develop effective advocacy strategies.

Occasionally and at key moments in the advocacy process, an outside strategy was needed as a demonstration of external support from a diverse group of stakeholders to put pressure on targeted elected officials. Advocates were able to leverage their own affiliate networks to engage them in Hill days and sign-on letters. They were also able to engage a wider group of national organizations that were part of the hub network as well as state organizations that were part of the Kitchen Cabinet. The Census Counts Campaign provided message points and actions through their listserv and weekly calls:

*“We created talking points for advocates so they could do their own letters, which they could use in meetings with legislators. We pulled together a few advocacy days where we brought in state groups and set up a whole bunch of meetings with their members so they could talk census because members always like hearing from their constituents.”*

The national census network’s wide range of organizations and coverage across states also enabled them to leverage organizations that reside in the district of key congressional representatives. The Census Project also leveraged its considerable membership and developed “sign-on letters” and “dear colleague letters” from congressional members. The letters were aligned with the Appropriations subcommittee deadlines and were an important tool as one advocate explained.

*“The letter has been an important piece of the puzzle because for appropriators, they need to receive those letters to understand the breadth of support that there is among their own members in the chambers, the House and Senate, for various funding priorities that fall under their subcommittees’ jurisdiction so it’s really important we make sure that letter gets in.”*

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<sup>33</sup> Experts were retained directly by stakeholders with their grant funds.

## The 2020 Census increased advocacy capacity and the base of support for the census that will be used now and into the future.

The hub infrastructure allowed for expanded advocacy engagement of other national organizations: a majority (90%) of national hubs reported they engaged in congressional advocacy. The Hill Strategy Group's coordinated strategy facilitated the ability of a broader group of organizations that were not traditional census advocates to support and participate in congressional advocacy. In fact, 20% of hub organizations reported they developed congressional advocacy capacity through this work.

Organizations participated in varying ways and to varying extents. Some signed on to letters of support and included their state and local affiliates. Some organizations from key congressional districts brought their affiliates, community representatives, and local elected officials to meet with their representatives and Tri-Caucus members. And some provided congressional testimony.

Slightly fewer organizations (78%) participated in advocating directly to the Census Bureau, with 33% reporting they built administrative advocacy capacity through their work—the majority of these organizations were completely new to the census. Census Bureau administrative advocacy is an on-going strategy that includes monitoring and holding the Bureau accountable. Historically, the circle of census advocates has been small; the 2020 Census and the Collaborative helped build the advocacy capacity and expand their number.

In addition to the expanded advocacy capacity, 2021 brought several important appointments of census stakeholders: Meghan Maury, formerly of The National LGBTQ Task Force, was appointed as Senior Advisor, Office of the Director at the Census Bureau, and Florencia (Flo) Gutierrez, Senior Research Associate Policy Reform & Advocacy, Annie E. Casey Foundation, has been appointed to the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee as a stakeholder for children.

# Funder Engagement in the 2020 Census

To confront expected challenges to a fair and accurate census, the Subgroup sought to increase support and engagement from philanthropy, thereby expanding the network of actors supporting the 2020 Census and increasing funding available to fund GOTC and advocacy activities. The Subgroup engaged the Funders Census Initiative (FCI) at the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation and the United Philanthropy Forum (the Forum) to act as conveners and organizers of the funder community and relied on funder partners to conduct outreach within their networks to expand the universe of funders who were informed and engaged in supporting the census.<sup>34</sup> This section provides an overview of funders engaged in the Collaborative and complements the overview with more details from a survey of 61 funders from 58 foundations who participated in the Collaborative.<sup>35</sup>

The Subgroup enabled and facilitated funders' engagement and successfully expanded the number of funders and the resources raised to support the 2020 Census; FCI played a key role in enabling funder participation.

When leaders from 10 foundations developed a plan to support a fair and accurate census in 2015, they recognized that

*"foundations have the chance to be a key catalyst in protecting [the census as] one of the most critical tools of democracy."<sup>36</sup>*

Accordingly, in drafting the Plan of Action and setting the path forward, one of the main goals was to expand the base of support and funding for the census, both as an outcome and a lever to develop support among other stakeholders, including local and state foundations, businesses, and elected officials. To achieve this goal, the Collaborative activated individual funders' influence and networks and partnered with the FCI and The Forum, as the key players in conducting funder outreach, providing technical assistance, and supporting their involvement with the census over time. FCI, in particular, was heavily mentioned in our data collection as a key player, functioning as a type of resource hub and coordinating table where

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<sup>34</sup> Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup. (2016). *Ensuring adequate policies and resources for the 2020 Census*.

<sup>35</sup> Sixty-one out of 200 funders who participated in the Collaborative's quarterly meetings and/or provided funding aligned with the Plan of Action responded to our survey.

<sup>36</sup> Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup. (2016). *Ensuring adequate policies and resources for the 2020 Census*.

funders could find resources, technical assistance, and information, and coordinate with each other. In addition, FCI played a pivotal role in funder outreach, bringing funders onboard to support the census in a variety of ways, which we discuss in more detail later in this section. Although our data collection did not cover The Forum’s work, a key informant familiar with their contribution acknowledged that “The Forum raised the visibility of the census to state and local funders, some of whom might not have otherwise understood the connection of census data to government funding.”

The Subgroup sought to raise funding to support the Collaborative through its own grantmaking and to mobilize more regional, state, and local funders to invest in census work in their regions, even if outside of the Collaborative. Ultimately, 126 foundations provided funding in alignment with the Plan of Action, totaling at least \$117 million dollars in philanthropic support for the 2020 Census (see Figure 15) and, as we describe in the following section, hundreds of other funders engaged in other ways. The amount of resources, which exceeded initial goals by far, and the number of foundations (and organizations) involved in the Collaborative were among the main accomplishments cited by key informants who facilitated the Collaborative’s work. In addition to national funding, the hope was to support state and local funders to increase their own funding to support the census.

*“I think the amount of money and engagement that we were able to get from national, state, and local funders was quite extraordinary. We raised well over a hundred million dollars. I think our goal starting out was around \$30 [million].”*

— Key Informant

Figure 15 | Summary of Funder Engagement in the 2020 Census



While the sociopolitical context and various challenges threatening the 2020 Census likely influenced the degree and ways in which funders engaged, funder engagement succeeded in increasing the number of foundations engaged over time and in bringing along new and diverse donors to support the census. Over half (53%) of the funders who responded to our survey were new to census work, as they had not funded census work in 2010. Funders who responded to the survey were diverse in their areas of focus, with 34% funding mostly

community or local work, 31% funding state or regional work, and 25% funding national work. Survey data suggests that funders engaged in the 2020 Census for a variety of reasons, which align with the original vision described in the Plan of Action. Around six in ten engaged to increase resources to historically underserved communities (61%) and to increase the participation of historically undercounted populations in democracy (57%), while around half more broadly sought a fair and accurate census (54%).

Overall, funders believed the Plan of Action was essential to the success of the Collaborative, and a majority believe the collaboration and infrastructure should be sustained in some form. Funders expressed deep appreciation for the usefulness and impact of the Collaborative and acknowledged that outcomes would have likely been worse had the Collaborative not provided census support. The Plan of Action was described as critical to their ability to garner and coordinate resources.

*“Having a coordinated Plan of Action and a committed, tireless core group overseeing implementation of that plan were essential to making the Census Collaborative an effective mechanism for supporting and influencing the implementation of the 2020 Census.”*

— Funder

## In addition to providing funding, funders leveraged their influence to support the census.

The Subgroup understood that funders have different levers to exert influence that include but are not limited to funding. Over time, funders used these levers in strategic moments, often playing a role beyond just providing funding. For example, 304 foundation executives signed a letter to the Commerce Department to drop the citizenship question. In 2019, a group of 29 national, regional, state, and community-based foundations and philanthropic-serving organizations signed on to an amicus brief against the inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 Census, outlining how census data is used by foundations and arguing that the question would have a negative impact on the accuracy of the census.<sup>37</sup> During the

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<sup>37</sup> Brief of Amici Curiae Foundations and Philanthropy-Serving Organizations in Support of Respondents, United States Department of Commerce V. State of New York. Supreme Court of the United States, 2019. [https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/18/18-966/95035/20190401200604897\\_18-966bsacFoundationsAndPhilanthropy-ServingOrganizations.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/18/18-966/95035/20190401200604897_18-966bsacFoundationsAndPhilanthropy-ServingOrganizations.pdf)

pandemic, more than 500 philanthropic institutions from nearly every state signed a letter to the Commerce Department asking it to not shorten the census timeline.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, roughly six in ten (61%) of surveyed funders reported that they interacted with local, regional, or national Census Bureau offices, while around half reported using their foundations' communications capacity to highlight/educate about the census (51%), connecting grantees to census information and resources (49%), and recruiting other funders (46%).

*“When we talked about engagement with funders, it was really this arc of engagement with a broad menu of options because we knew that not every funder was going to contribute to a national pooled fund, or a state fund, or even do dedicated grantmaking to their own grantees. We wanted to make it as easy as possible for funders to just jump in so that could have taken the form of additional general operating support, or it could have been using the communications platform of your foundation to talk about the importance of this work. . . . We really approached census engagement in a very broad way.”*

— Key Informant

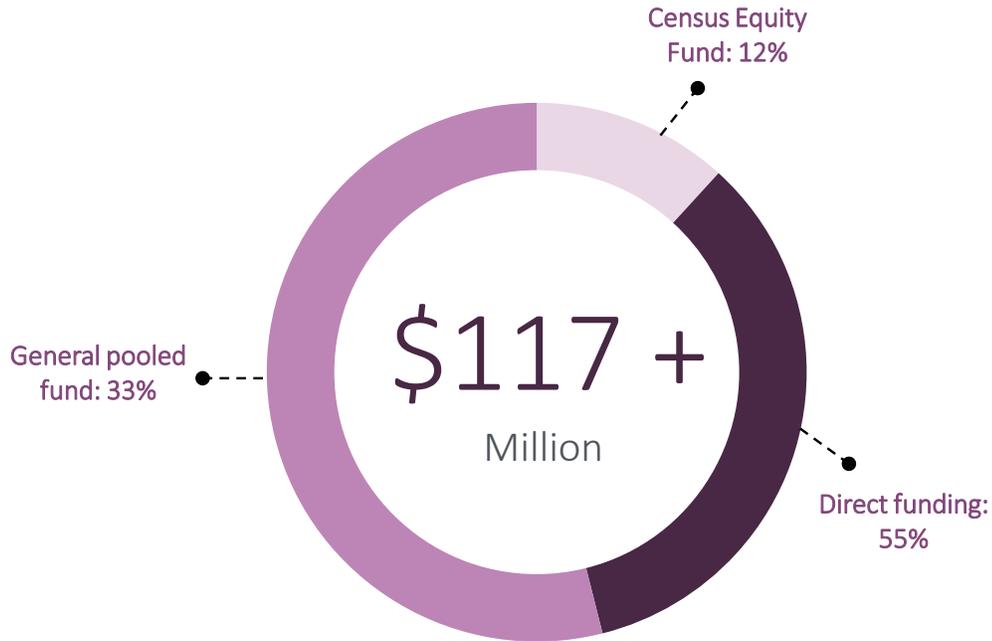
### The Collaborative facilitated and enabled funder engagement by designing different ways to participate and providing on-going support to build census-specific knowledge and skills.

The Subgroup intentionally designed multiple ways in which funders could support the census in alignment with the Plan of Action. Funders could do so on their own, through their individual grantmaking portfolios, or they could contribute funds to a pool overseen by the Subgroup and housed at New Venture Fund. These pooled funds were designed so that funders could easily contribute regardless of their census knowledge, experience, or grantmaking capacity and allowed funders to rapidly deploy resources in response to changing circumstances and emergent needs. The pooled fund also allowed for funders to designate resources for the CEF. As Figure 16 shows, slightly less than half of philanthropic spending happened through the pooled funds, highlighting the value of this structure. Strikingly, as funders became more comfortable with the pooled fund, the share of giving to it increased dramatically.

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<sup>38</sup> Philanthropic Letter to Commerce Secretary. Funders' Committee for Civic Participation, August 5 2020. <https://funderscommittee.org/resource/letter-funder-letter-to-commerce-secretary/>

Figure 16 | Funding by Type of Grantmaking Strategy



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, funders adapted their grantmaking strategy: 46% provided or increased funding to extend GOTC work, 41% for digital strategies, and 36% for communications. Most funders (89%) reported that the Collaborative helped them *understand* the emerging challenges, and 68% reported that it helped them *respond* to these challenges.

In addition to the funding structures, the Collaborative provided other supports to funders that responded to what they were looking for. The top three ways in which working with the Collaborative helped foundations were

- 80% deepened their knowledge about the census
- 77% accessed resources and expertise about the census
- 54% found support in making the case to their foundation’s leadership and board about the importance of the census

Because funders engaged in the census in other ways beyond providing funding, they too had access to and used resources the Collaborative made available. Funders could use these resources for their own work and/or connect their grantees with those resources. Survey data shows that 82% of funders used at least one resource from the Collaborative to support their own work, with the top three most used including quarterly meetings cohosted by the Subgroup and Funders Census Initiative (at the Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation) (69%), research and fact sheets on census issues such as on undercounts and how census

influences federal funding (64%), and research and policy analysis (62%). Meanwhile, three out of four funders (74%) connected their grantees to at least one resource, among which the top three were the Census Counts Campaign (56%), the CUNY interactive map (50%), and messaging research and communications webinars/trainings (46%).

As one key informant explained, these structures and resources set up an infrastructure that adequately supported funders' work and enabled deeper collaboration:

*“The way the work was funded really fostered collaboration. It really helped to break down silos between national and state funders. Often state funders feel like national funders have these tight relationships and coordinated strategies and they’re doing grantmaking in states really without the consultation or coordination with state-based funders, but the leadership of the Subgroup worked in a way that I think really fostered collaboration and helped to break down those silos and build a strong community where state funders really felt like had a seat at the table in the work.”*

— Key Informant

These structures also facilitated funders' partnerships with grantees and other implementing organizations. Quarterly meetings were particularly helpful spaces in which funders and organizations could come together to learn and complement each other's work. In fact, national hubs rated funder partnerships as the second most valuable resource for their work. However, these relationships were not always smooth, and some got off to a rocky start, as funders' active roles beyond grantmaking were sometimes perceived as too intrusive into organizations' work. These role and power dynamics issues were ultimately ironed out but did hamper collaborations over time.

**There is energy and interest for continued funder engagement, and funders' interests related to the 2030 Census require very early if not on-going engagement.**

One of the key learnings for philanthropy from the 2010 Census was the need to start supporting the census early in the process. In exploring ways to prepare foundations for early support for the 2030 Census, the Subgroup presented a scenario of a smaller set of activities to keep the infrastructure connected in the next few years before more intense engagement. Presented with this scenario, 64% of funders reported that they would engage by participating in annual or semi-annual meetings to discuss strategy and other issues about the census. Around one fourth mentioned they would provide grants to continue the work,

whether through a pooled fund or direct grantmaking, though more would support state-level work (30%) than national work (12%). Even though this proportion might seem low, it could be enough to sustain a modest level of work as well as some of the infrastructure while activities intensify later in the decade for the 2030 cycle, and the 31% of funders who reported they would likely re-engage closer to the next census are ready to support the work again.

When thinking about the most important issues for their institution related to the 2030 Census, funders reported on the top three as addressing undercounts among historically undercounted populations (79%), improving the questions and increasing sampling size of historically undercounted communities in the ACS (56%), and limiting the addition of questions about citizenship or immigration status (44%). All of these priorities require early efforts to shape and influence the design of the 2030 Census, which the Census Bureau will undertake between now and 2025 rather than later in the decade when most stakeholders begin to engage, pointing to the importance of very early or on-going efforts from philanthropy.

## Cross-Cutting Findings

*“You really have to recognize that if it weren’t for this philanthropy-funded coordinated effort to promote census participation through outreach efforts, targeting hard-to-count communities, and the information network that was created, the Census Bureau would have been in deep trouble. Because it really was the network of stakeholders that ended up being the conduit to the Census Bureau and vice versa to share information on a real-time rapid basis, to address challenges in real time, and then to convey to the Census Bureau challenges and problems on the ground in real time.”*

– *Census Stakeholder*

While our evaluation focused on understanding how well different parts of the strategy worked, we find it is always helpful and important to also step back and take a look at the whole. How sound were the underlying assumptions? What did we learn about the underlying theory behind the different tactics and activities? Here we lift up some key findings that emerged.

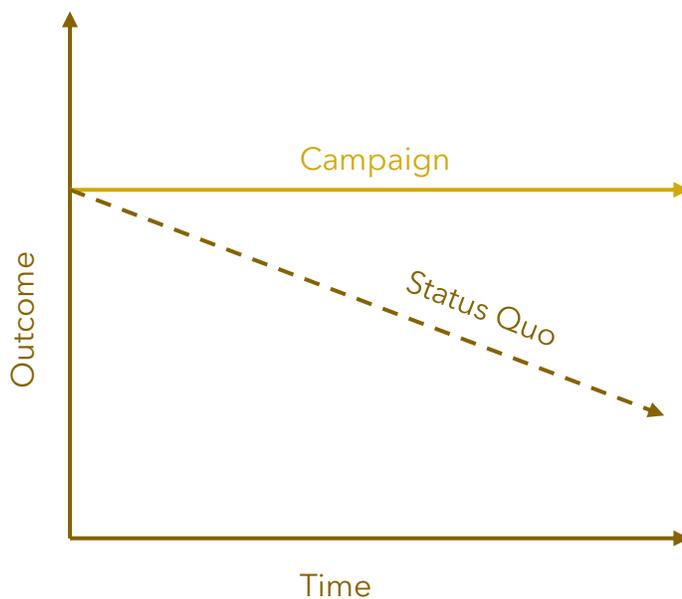
At the highest level, we think the overall approach to working towards a fair and accurate census was sound and effective. While there are always lessons to learn and tweaks that could have been made, the ethos and approaches taken resulted in strong advocacy and GOTC efforts in a particularly challenging time.

As seen within the findings of the elements we evaluated most deeply (i.e., national infrastructure, CEF elements of other state/local GOTC efforts, some advocacy wins), the Collaborative effectively built capacity, built connections, expanded the base of people and organizations who saw the census as an issue to focus time and resources on, and adapted and pivoted to myriad challenges and changing external contexts along the way.

The 2020 Census was not normal. It was plagued, politicized, and ever-changing. The conditions under which the 2020 Census took place were unprecedented, to use a now overused descriptor. Mitigating harm or defending against negative policies is par for the course in advocacy work and advocacy evaluation. The census campaign, however, was multidimensional advocacy on the defense, fighting to ward off potential losses and disadvantageous policies, in Congress, within the Census Bureau, in the courts, on the state level, in communities, and in the media. Under such circumstances, what does impact look like?

The Democracy Fund’s Liz Ruedy identified six models of impact to help understand and assess such complicated situations. She noted that under such circumstances, “The challenge is not just in measuring the impact that we’re having—it is in **how we think about what impact looks like** in the first place.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, impact is not always defined by policy and systems change victories or measurable increases in advocacy outcomes. Impact can also be preventing further decline or damage and holding a system steady until an opportunity arises for positive change. In other words, a stabilizing impact (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17 | Stabilizing Impact Model**



Now, imagine all of these same operational, political, public health/social justice challenges occurred, without a fulsome infrastructure in place with ways to share information and strategize about how to respond and provide new supports and funding to those on the ground. While it can’t be empirically proven, it seems highly unlikely that the census count would be the same without the actions of the many stakeholders that were part of this effort, efforts that were coordinated and focused specifically on historically undercounted populations.

Several key lessons are learned from the Census Campaign’s stabilizing impact:

- Many of the events and circumstance surrounding the census were unknown and unplanned for. However, the ecosystem of organizations that had been funded and the infrastructure that supported and facilitated their collaboration

<sup>39</sup> Six models for understanding impact. Liz Ruedy, 2018. <https://democracyfund.org/idea/six-models-for-understanding-impact/>

and coordination created a readiness and ability to respond to these unforeseen events in a coordinated manner.

- The focus on historically undercounted populations centered this work and this ecosystem. The importance of this focus was magnified in light of the impact of the pandemic on Census Bureau operations and the administration's politics. While there is no counterfactual to assess against this, the efforts to confront attempts to prevent the participation of immigrant populations, the economic and health impacts of the pandemic on the historically undercounted, as well as the civil unrest, the changing timeline of the census door-to-door operations during a state shutdowns, and the proposed statistical imputation methods to achieve a complete count that would undercount communities of color are indicators of the initiative's stabilizing impact on the inclusion of historically undercounted populations in the 2020 Census.
- The reach and connectivity of the network, particularly into states that had high historically undercounted populations and limited philanthropic and public resources, was a significant contribution both in terms of financial resources provided through the CEF and the catalytic role of those grants in promoting state and local collaboration across community organizations. In many cases, this initial step was the catalyst to engage governments and secure local public funding to support GOTC efforts.
- Throughout, a sense of reciprocity across levels as well as a willingness to rapidly pivot and adapt through the structures, relationships, and an array of available resources made the network and response resilient and productive.

*“My biggest takeaway is we were damn resilient. You could not have imagined the set of circumstances that went into this decennial, and the resilience of the organizations and the individuals who were responsible for responding to every single change we had to encounter was profoundly significant. We were all resilient and pivoted successfully and did a tremendous, tremendous job with the hand we were dealt.”*

**– National Hub**

The overall strategy of building and supporting a diverse network of stakeholders over time allowed for broad mobilization, effective exchange and adaptation, a network effect beyond those directly involved, and combinations of capacities toward the shared goal of a quality census.

One funder described the importance of collaboration, *“There is power in coming together around an issue. So much more can be accomplished when we coordinate and work together.”* The challenge was promoting collaboration at scale, with organizations who had little census experience, and with new stakeholders. In many ways, the gargantuan task of the census and the challenging external conditions necessitated and catalyzed collaboration, creating conditions that promoted self-organizing; the infrastructure created the means for self-organizing and collaboration. Foundation resources supported and enabled collaboration, and in the case of the CEF, also catalyzed it. Collaboration with other organizations, with funders, and with the Census Counts Campaign were some of the most valued resources by census stakeholders.

Networks can be powerful tools for advancing social change, but they don’t always work. Networks need infrastructure to support connection and exchange, may take different shapes, and may meet different purposes.<sup>40</sup> In looking across the efforts of the Collaborative, we see a lot of evidence where the network strategy played out effectively and was a useful way to build skills and support partnerships. We see through the data that this network of networks successfully supported a few key purposes:

- Delivery: Channeling resources and assistance to increase capacity
- Exchange: Sharing information widely
- Mobilization: Reaching and activating many people
- Advocacy: Influencing existing decision-making structures (more on this in the next section) and collaboration and extending the reach of the work, not merely connecting people

We also heard about and saw evidence of the ways in which the network fostered reciprocity, not merely top-down directedness nor a more transactional/extractive relationship among the members. Members of the network benefited from those with the niche policy expertise required with the census, while those less expert in the census brought

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<sup>40</sup> Plastrick, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). *Harnessing the power of networks for social impact: Connecting to change the world*. <https://islandpress.org/resources/connecting.pdf>

information from the ground that could inform the supports provided, the advocacy needed, and the funding required to respond to the moment.

There were key aspects and functions of the strategy that made it impactful:

- **The breadth and depth of the network itself.** In many ways “infrastructure” became the short-hand term to describe the ecosystem of organizations working on the census and the elements that enabled them to collaborate, coordinate, and pivot. No single organization could have undertaken this work alone. The strategy also successfully brought a lot of newcomers to census work and had a lot of success building knowledge and skills specific to census work and across national hubs and other state/local organizations. Given the technical and specific nature of census work—and as something that many people may not think about for a decade at a time—this is no small feat. While there was significant enthusiasm for the infrastructure, there was also feedback that it was too complicated, that organizations did not fully understand the scope of it, and that it could have more effectively leveraged other existing tables for efficiency. It was telling that many hubs, which were central to this infrastructure, did not know who many other national hubs there were. Despite this, there was consistent feedback on the valuable role the infrastructure played in supporting advocacy and funder engagement and providing connections across the three parts of the work, allowing all three parts of the Plan of Action to benefit from the intel, technical expertise, resources, and relationships across the strategy. The diversity and shared goals across the network meant it could function with greater responsiveness and cultural competence. For example, when the pandemic made canvassing impossible and digital strategies were challenging or limited due to lack of broadband, organizations reverted to flyers, door knockers, billboards, inserts, and radio and television ads. Direct service providers became a critical conveyors of census messages. The network promoted flexibility and innovation so that groups on the ground modified these kinds of outreach strategies to be appropriate for their populations.
- **Critical network venues and supports.** There was a steady flow of information through regular calls, meetings, emails, and listservs across the network, enabling a sharing of information and resources across regions and stakeholders. The steady flow of information was often overwhelming but appreciated. Because of the on-going changes to the census, a preponderance of the information was coming from the national hubs and, in particular, the Census Counts Campaign. However, as the campaign proceeded, the information from groups on the ground providing intelligence on census implementation was vital to the ability of national hubs to advocate for changes to the Census Bureau and hold them accountable. These two-way communications channels and the central role of the Census Counts Campaign

enabled the network to have a rapid response function and fill a gap in ground-up information flow about census operations. Likewise, funders also benefited from being in the loop, being able to sign on to letters to the Bureau, and providing funding to emergent needs through the pooled fund or individually. Additionally, core staff provided “glue” and network weavers across the different elements that allowed for coordination, core leadership, and responsiveness.

- **The benefits of the network extended across stakeholders, including beyond those directly funded,** in a number of ways. For example, CEF grantees were connected to national hubs as well as digital strategies and consultants. Some of the S-CAN organizations were connected to the text messaging campaign. The network effect created by the core hub organizations and S-CAN expanded the reach of this network to both funded and unfunded state and local organizations. The trove of census resources was available to all organizations regardless of funding. Additionally, small grants were distributed through several of the national hubs to support local census outreach activities. Some hubs were also able to procure additional foundation resources to regrant to members in their networks to support census outreach. These grants were particularly valuable under COVID conditions.

The collective ecosystem of organizations, supportive resources, and infrastructure supported by flexible and efficient grantmaking enabled organizations to respond to on-going and unprecedented external challenges to mitigate the damage to the 2020 Census. While this larger-scale, diverse network of networks may have had some inefficiencies, the ways in which the strategy and implementation kept true to ideas of self-organization, reciprocity, and decentralization also potentially meant it had more resilience and ability to respond and adapt, with broader cultural competence than if it had a more hierarchical “command and control” structure. It may be worth reflecting in the future on the degree to which efficiency should be optimized and how much redundancies and overlap also had different benefits and strengths, as this strategy demonstrated.

**The ability to embrace an emergent approach and lean into adaptation and responsive pivoting served the strategy well.**

It’s also important to recognize that the strategy and infrastructure regularly adapted and evolved over time in response to feedback and changing circumstances. It wasn’t as though the Plan of Action resulted in an infrastructure that was set to run aligned to the census calendar; rather new stakeholders and members were added and incorporated over time,

and new tactics emerged, and some tactics were bolstered in response to the challenges. For example: the CEF, a planned strategy to provide multiple rounds of grants in states, provided more resources than had been initially planned; the pool of consultants was expanded to address communications and digital gaps among other emerging needs; and the Census Quality Reinforcement table was funded to respond to data quality issues. These changes were in response to the conditions and were enabled by the tremendous fundraising success of the Census Subgroup that was not anticipated. As the budget expanded over time so did the network of funded organizations, and supports evolved, and the infrastructure itself was built and evolved to be responsive over time. To quote an overused analogy, the plane was being built while being flown, and the team doing so managed this with a lot of acuity and responsiveness to feedback over time.

There are different ways to conceptualize strategy. One more traditional business model is to look at the degree to which a planned strategy was realized or unrealized, alongside what may have been added along the way.<sup>41</sup> When we reflect on the overall gestalt of the Collaborative's approach, it seems as though little strategy was unrealized, but the twists and turns of 2020 meant a large proportion was responsive to the changing context and environment.

adrienne maree brown (who writes her name in lowercase) describes emergent strategy<sup>42</sup> as ways to practice being in “*right relationship in our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.*” Her description includes important principles, such as “Change is constant (be like water)” and “Trust the people.” While this wasn't a purposeful frame for the work, it may be helpful for reflecting on how the elements of emergent strategy were realized.

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<sup>41</sup> Mintzberg, H., Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, 6(3). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2486186?seq=1>

<sup>42</sup> Brown, A. M. (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press.

**Table 3 | Elements of Emergent Strategy and Examples from the Collaborative**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example of realization in the strategy</i>
<b>Fractal</b>	Repeating patterns across different scales	Within and across hubs and between hubs and state/local groups, across state/local organizations, and across and within funders, there were shared values of reciprocity, commitment to historically undercounted populations, and willingness to adapt/evolve/adjust. These shared values created strength and consistency across a distributed network of networks.
<b>Intentional adaptation</b>	Changing to fit purpose and situation toward an aim or purpose	This census had a particularly strong set of pivot points, caused by the administration and Bureau, as well as external events. As demonstrated throughout the report, funders, advocates, hubs, and local organizations made many shifts but maintained a focus on the best count possible.
<b>Interdependence and decentralization</b>	Mutual dependence; distribution of functions or powers	The network did not have a central hub and spoke model but rather was interconnected, overlapping, and broad. While Leadership Conference and the Census Counts Campaign played a role as a hub of hubs, there were values of learning and sharing across. The whole was greater than the sum of the parts.
<b>Nonlinear and iterative</b>	Not in a straight line; involving repetitions	While it could seem that the census operations would have a clear set of steps and phases, in this case, external events and politics meant many changing timelines. In many ways, the groups iterated over materials, messages, and approaches in response to the nonlinear nature of the work, as well as lessons learned along the way.
<b>Resilience</b>	Ability to recover and transform	Per the preceding point about pivots, this census required great resilience among those engaging in GOTC work and advocacy. New challenges regularly emerged, and a strong set of values and commitment to a shared goal kept stakeholders moving forward in face of numerous obstacles and shifts.

<b>Creating more possibilities</b>	To cause to come into being that which may or can exist	While the infrastructure developed was intended for the 2020 Census, the connections and shared experience means that the network could be activated in different and potentially unexpected ways for more work that advances the interests of those who society too often marginalizes and decenters.
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Without the ability and capacities to listen, respond, adapt, and pivot, we do not believe the strategy would have been as effective in these challenging and volatile times.

**The 2020 Census was more than a campaign; it was a catalyst for understanding the foundational role of the census in democracy and power for historically undercounted populations. This awareness fuels the commitment of organizations to continue working on census and related efforts.**

Most national organizations have or plan to collaborate with other hubs to prepare for the 2030 Census. One quarter had already collaborated with others to prepare for 2030. Most (70%) of national hubs will monitor and advocate for census-related issues on an on-going basis, and most of those organizations had little to no prior census experience, demonstrating increased interest and commitment for engaging this year. Only one hub said they wouldn't engage in the census again. This reflects important census capacity that has been built and an expansion of stakeholders for the issue. When asked about the hubs' plans to collaborate with partners made through their GOTC work for non-GOTC work, the majority reported focusing on mitigating 2020 Census data quality issues in support of apportionment, redistricting, and federal funding efforts (74%).

At the state and local level, we also found strong intentions around on-going and future census work. Eighty percent of CEF grantees (93% among S-CAN) have or plan to leverage partnerships built through this process to support the 2030 Census. Almost half of national hub affiliates (49%) reported that they plan to prepare and advocate for the 2030 Census moving forward, and 44% reported continuing to help the Census Bureau improve their outreach efforts. Similarly, CEF and S-CAN respondents also reported collaborating around redistricting and advocacy around changes to census operations.

It is worth noting that these responses were captured in Fall 2020, in or soon after the last push for the Census Bureau's Nonresponse Follow up work and during a time when the final end date for census response was pending lawsuits. The fact that partners at this point in

time in the process intended to continue related work could mean high commitment, given that this could have also been a time of census fatigue.

Data suggest that the partnerships created by national, state and local organizations was not merely transactional for the purposes of improving the 2020 Census count, but rather that the infrastructure developed was expected to have a life for other kinds of civic engagement efforts and has implications for the sustainability of a longer-term infrastructure.

The 2020 Census was a huge undertaking, one that required expertise, resources and skills, and extensive organizing and campaigning efforts. Local and national civic engagement infrastructure was built that could be leveraged in post-GOTC census-related work. In addition to asking various stakeholders about their intentions for future census-related engagement, we also wanted to understand the degree to which the infrastructure that had been created would have a life beyond Census 2020.

During the time of GOTC work, **many stakeholders noted leveraging census partnerships for COVID-19 response.** Eighty-two percent of CEF grantees and half of S-CAN organizations reported having collaborated or having plans to collaborate with partners made through their GOTC work on their COVID-19 response.

**Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts leveraged census partnerships, especially at the state and local level.** Half of national organizations *had already* leveraged partnerships made through the census infrastructure for issue-specific advocacy GOTV efforts, and an additional 21% of them reported that they also *planned* to continue doing so in the future. More than three quarters of CEF survey respondents (76%) *had already* collaborated with their census partnerships for GOTV, while nearly half of S-CAN grantees did so (49%). Similarly, 49% of national hub affiliates reported *planning* to continue to do work around voter education and engagement, 43% around voter registration, and 42% around GOTV. This pattern holds for state and local organizations, as 87% of CEF grantees and 80% of S-CAN organizations *had or planned* to leverage census partnerships to engage in GOTV in the 2020 election. It is fair to note, again, the timing of this survey and this census. The extended timeframe for finishing the count started to overlap with GOTV efforts for the 2020 election cycle.

**Partnerships built through census may also benefit other advocacy work.** Around half of national organizations had already leveraged partnerships made through the census infrastructure for issue-specific advocacy (53%). An additional 30% planned to do so in the future. Forty-three percent of national hub affiliates reported that their census work catalyzed or will catalyze new collaborations around other issue-specific advocacy efforts beyond the 2020 Census. Similarly, 44% of CEF organizations and 28% of S-CAN organizations

had already leveraged partnerships for issue-specific advocacy, and an additional 15% and 30%, respectively, reported that they planned to continue to do this work.

**Funders similarly saw signs that the built infrastructure had broader use.** Funders also noted that the civic infrastructure built in their state was used in several other ways. Sixty-one percent of funders said that the local civic infrastructure that was built for the census was repurposed to address the pandemic and redistricting, and half said that it was repurposed for non-partisan GOTV. Twenty-four percent said that it was being repurposed for election protection.

While we don't know the degree to which all of these were new connections, the opportunity to work together during this contentious count seems to have built longer-term organizational capacity and interest in the census in particular and in partnerships for other democratic work more broadly.

This data on new partnerships and collaborations catalyzed along with the social network analysis presented earlier in the evaluation reflect that a nationwide network has been built or strengthened through the census. This may not have been a primary goal of the funder strategy but nevertheless it is an important outcome. The census, as a fundamental issue, unifies organizations across populations, agendas, geography and ideology. This was evident in the richness of network connections that the census catalyzed. The on-going collaborations and intent to collaborate are indicators of its potential moving forward.

*“We as a network, were talking to from 50 organizations to 80 organizations through the census. So for us, we developed relationships in states where we did not have relationships like in Georgia. Now we have a map that is bigger just because we connected to some organizations that otherwise we would have not connected to.”*

**– National Hub**



# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

## Evaluator Reflections

As inside–outside players to this census, we’d like to share a few observations for consideration going forward. These are informed by the data, and also, more broadly, by our experiences with other projects, clients, useful frameworks, and concepts that we think might be useful.



**Should census work be conceptualized as an infinite game versus a finite game? Is it an event or a moment in a broader, on-going piece of civic engagement and democracy?**

Finite games are things with clear rules of engagement, clear winners and losers, and clear timeframes. An easy analogy is a football game: you have a field, a referee, a time limit, and a clear end. In some ways, any given census could be viewed in that way: A specific campaign in which there is a referee (i.e., the Census Bureau), a time limit (i.e., a start and stop), and a clear end result (i.e., the public “wins” or “loses” depending on the quality of the count). However, not all advocates and stakeholders see the census this way. An infinite game is one in which it’s hard to have agreed upon ways to determine who wins or loses, and expectations around timelines can differ and change. Infinite games are more like advocacy or raising a child. Rather than thinking of the census as a decennial event, we know some advocates think of it as an on-going game, with regular engagement all the time, not just for

some years ahead of a count. There are many wins and losses and outcomes along the way: relationships built and maintained, expertise gained and leveraged, and opportunities to influence and shift administrative decisions along the way. For these stakeholders, **the census is less of an event and more of a long-game with episodic periods of intensity with which to build upon past efforts and use again going forward.** It sets the stage for both real-time administrative advocacy, which is already underway for 2030, as well as longer-term proactive defensive advocacy, where laying the groundwork to more effectively respond to future threats is possible.<sup>43</sup> A broader conceptualization of census work in this type of framework could help all actors think differently about this work. Obviously, the intense periods of a particular census count effort matter; but so do all the years when thoughts of the relevance of census may seem farther away.



### **The operationalization of the strategy modelled emergent strategy. Could more explicit use of an emergent strategy framework add value?**

While the architects, funders, and implementers of the strategy lived emergent principles implicitly in the implementation of the work, we lifted up the framework (see pages 85) because we think it could be useful to reflect on where or when more mindfulness and intentionality around some of the elements could be helpful. For instance, in what ways could the idea of fractals, repeating values and patterns at all levels of scale, be built into the work? Could a focus on resilience help ensure that the infrastructure doesn't lose key members to burnout in the on-going, challenging work of fighting against oppression and marginalization? How could adoption and use of a strategy framework by a Black social justice facilitator and healer help create new ideas and connections within this broad and diverse ecosystem? We think these may be useful concepts to continue to puzzle over and wrestle with going forward.



### **It could be helpful to think about the infrastructure that has been supported and advanced as a power ecosystem.**

The evaluation found that beyond a census infrastructure being built, a diverse multi-issue, civic engagement ecosystem was catalyzed that contained infrastructure to support collaboration and coordination for the census and issues beyond. While the strategy was

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<sup>43</sup> ORS Impact, 2019. *When the best offense is a good defense.*  
[https://www.orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/4232020\\_123618\\_15\\_Defensive\\_Advocacy\\_ORI\\_Impact.pdf](https://www.orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/4232020_123618_15_Defensive_Advocacy_ORI_Impact.pdf)

largely built on ideas associated with campaigns and networks, we think the *power ecosystem* framework provides a broader frame to describe what was built, how it was used, and how it may be leveraged moving forward.

The power ecosystem framework describes “*the network of organizations, relationships, and infrastructure necessary to ensure that people who have been historically marginalized have voice and agency to build power and create an inclusive democracy.*”<sup>44</sup> The power ecosystem is defined by six key elements: (1) It is centered in impacted communities; (2) the members of the ecosystem have a shared set of values and a root cause analysis of the problem; (3) the ecosystem is grounded in relationships of varying strengths that result in collaboration through self-organizing; (4) various forms of infrastructure are present to facilitate information sharing, collaboration, and coordination; (5) it is comprised of a diverse array of actors; and (6) it possess seven key capacities (organizing, advocacy, civic engagement and electoral, governing, narrative, adaptive, and developmental and supportive) that enable it to take a range of actions and build power.

The framework also recognizes the role of foundations in the ecosystem, describes the power dynamics inherent in those relationships, and how an ecosystem approach can be used to break down issue silos to address the root causes of inequities. Funders were a critical part of the Collaborative and played numerous roles beyond the grantmaking. The collaboration between funders and grantees evolved and improved over time with 84% of national hubs describing funder partnerships as very valuable. The Collaborative reflects what funders along with stakeholders accomplished as well as what can be accomplished collectively as an ecosystem.

The table that follows summarizes the application of the ecosystem framework to the census initiative. The analysis that follows focuses on the elements that were of particular significance to the Collaborative’s strategy: relationships, infrastructure, and capacities.

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<sup>44</sup> Barsoum, G., & Farrow, F. (2020). *An ecosystem to build power and advance health and racial equity: A report for the California Endowment*. Center for the Study of Social Policy.

**Table 4 | Description of the Civic Engagement Ecosystem**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
<b>Centered in impacted communities</b>	Historically undercounted populations were centered in the Collaborative’s strategy. They were both the focus of the strategy and integral to the implementation and success of the strategy.
<b>Vision and values</b>	The census was viewed from an equity lens, it was a means to ensure historically undercounted populations were counted to receive their equitable share of resources and representation.
<b>Composition</b>	The Collaborative successfully cultivated a diverse array of stakeholders to support trusted community-based messengers to reach historically undercounted populations. The ecosystem included national, state, and local organizations working on a range of issue and with a range of capacities from organizing, advocacy, direct services, faith organizations, businesses. The ecosystem also included national, state, and local foundations, and philanthropic serving organizations that supported the ecosystem on multiple levels, in multiple ways, and through the lens of a diversity of foundation priority issues. The number and diversity of national hub organizations expanded the population and geographic reach of the census initiative. The greater the diversity of an ecosystem, the greater the range of capacities and constituencies it has access to and the stronger the ecosystem.
<b>Relationships</b>	Facilitating and building relationships to promote collaboration among the census stakeholders in the ecosystem was central to the strategy. No single organization could accomplish this work alone so the Collaborative encouraged collaboration through the hub structure, the CEF as well as the Census Counts Campaign. The Collaborative was also critical to promoting relationships and collaboration among funders through the use of the Plan of Action, frequent communications channels, and quarterly meetings.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	The Collaborative funded infrastructure to promote information sharing and learning, collaboration, coordination, and strategy development. This took the form of standing meetings and tables. The most formalized form of infrastructure was the Census Counts Campaign. It was the hub of hubs and became the central go-to

	table on all things census, for funders, the Funders Census Initiative played an analogous role. The Census Quarterly Meetings brought all stakeholders together.
<b>Capacities present and built</b>	The census ecosystem possessed a range of skills and levels of census experience that were brought to bear on the census and have the potential to be used for issues beyond the census. Numerous capacities were also built through the census work.

We hope that the framework and approach will also provide stakeholders and funders with a way to think about how to maintain, build, and leverage this ecosystem.

## Conclusion

We know this became a long report: the effort to support a high-quality count, especially among those historically undercounted, was always a large and sprawling undertaking. With the external context of 2020, extensions of the count, and corresponding responses by those working on the count, memorializing the work, its results, and the lessons learned became correspondingly broad and rich as well.

This report doesn't seek to answer all questions about the census effort or its effectiveness, but we did want to provide an outside assessment of some key aspects of the strategy to better understand what worked, what kinds of interim outcomes were achieved, and what conditions were necessary for things to unfold as they did.

We also know this is largely a positive evaluation story. We do believe at the end of the day that there is much to celebrate in how the strategy was designed and implemented. These efforts are something to recognize and build upon.

And finally, we hope that a key takeaway for those who have made it to the end is to give serious thought to how to not let this infrastructure—this web of relationships, connections, capacities—languish. This robust and diverse ecosystem may not need the same level of support and activity for on-going civic engagement or census work, but it would be a shame to let such an asset languish or fall fallow.

# Appendix A | Methodology

## DATA SOURCES

To inform this evaluation, we segmented the different types of stakeholders who engaged with the Collaborative and designed appropriate data collection methods to gather from them. As Table 5 shows, we fielded separately five surveys and two sets of interviews and conducted an on-going secondary data review. Table 5 provides more details about the different data sources we used.

**Table 5 | Details about Data Sources Used in the Evaluation**

<i>Data collection type</i>	<i>Stakeholder type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Universe (total number of organizations)</i>	<i>Sample (total respondents)</i>	<i>Data collection timeframe</i>
Survey	National hubs	Organizations supporting the census at a national level that received funding to engage in GOTC directly and by supporting state and local organizations, especially their affiliate networks	31	20	November 2020–January 2021
Survey	Census Equity Fund	Organizations supporting the census at the state and local level in states with high numbers of historically undercounted populations and limited philanthropic and public census funding	69	52	October–November 2020
Survey	S-CAN Organizations	Organizations supporting the census at the state and local level who subscribed to the S-CAN network led by The Leadership Conference and State Voices	1,104	105	October–November 2020
Survey	National hub affiliates	Affiliate networks of national hub organizations supporting the census at the state and	1598 affiliates from 10 national hubs	378 from 10 national hubs	January–March 2021

<i>Data collection type</i>	<i>Stakeholder type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Universe (total number of organizations)</i>	<i>Sample (total respondents)</i>	<i>Data collection timeframe</i>
		local level that received support from their national counterpart			
<b>Survey</b>	Census funders	Private funders who engaged with the Collaborative by providing funding and/or participating in the Collaborative’s meetings or events	204	61	March 2021
<b>Interviews</b>	Census key informants	Funders, consultants, and other staff who played a key role in supporting the census infrastructure created by the Collaborative or census experts who engaged with the Collaborative to enhance their work	N/A	15 <i>Note: Qualitative sample designed to provide key perspectives on the Collaborative’s support of the 2020 Census.</i>	March 2021
<b>Interviews</b>	Key census advocates	Organizations that received funding and played a key role in advocating for census appropriations and against the inclusion of the citizenship question	N/A	7 <i>Note: Qualitative sample designed to provide key perspectives on advocacy efforts to achieve policy improvements that supported the 2020 Census.</i>	January–March 2021
<b>Document Review</b>	Secondary data	Subgroup strategy documents, grantmaking information, meeting materials and notes, presentation materials, emails and communications materials, past surveys conducted by other stakeholders, 50 state reports, and meeting observations	N/A	N/A	On-going 2018–April 2021

## DATA ANALYSIS

Given the variety of data sources, our team developed a mixed-methods process to systematically analyze each source individually and then triangulate with other sources to develop a more complete and cohesive evaluation report. The process was as follows:

1. For the five surveys implemented, ORS Impact used descriptive statistics for initial analysis. Where appropriate, additional analysis through cross tabulation allowed for group comparisons.
2. All interview data was analyzed using a standard thematic coding approach where we developed a codebook responding to specific learning questions for each individual set of interviews (national hubs, key informants separately) and coded interviews accordingly, grouping key findings by topic of interest.
3. Using the evaluation questions as a guide, the team triangulated data from different sources to establish findings and identify the appropriate evidence supporting each finding, looking for ways in which the data sources confirmed or contradicted each other or provided more nuance about specific findings.
4. Finally, we held up findings and evidence against the different frameworks introduced in the report to develop our final assessment and recommendations.

## LIMITATIONS

As with all evaluations, there were tradeoffs involved in how we designed the evaluation, and we understand that there are certain limitations inherent in our approach, mostly related to limitations in scope and reach, including the following:

1. **Not all grantees or grants are covered under our evaluation:** There were too many grants and grantees, and we had to prioritize where to focus. We tried to touch on the main strategies as much as possible and acknowledge that there are other reports, exit memos, and post-mortems from key players that provide more detailed information on specific strategies.
2. **The design does not evaluate specific grantees or grants:** Our approach was to take a higher-level look at what the collection of grants and supports accomplished rather than evaluate specific grantees' work. Nevertheless, in a separate but related effort, the Subgroup funded ORS Impact to develop evaluation reports for national hubs that opted into that option. Those documents were developed as internal resources to support national hubs' work moving forward.
3. **The evaluation does not cover in detail how census work happened at the national, state, and local level:** Given that our task was to evaluate the national funders' strategy to support the census, we focused on assessing how the work happened at the national level and how and to

what extent it connected to state and local efforts. In a separate but related effort, ORS Impact developed public reports to document and summarize how the work unfolded in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In addition, several states developed state-specific evaluations.

- 4. The evaluation does not document the strategy in great detail for posterity:** One of the goals for the evaluation process was to memorialize the work to inform future efforts. However, we focused on assessing how the Collaborative supported the 2020 Census rather than describing the Collaborative in detail and instead worked with a consultant hired to tell the story of funders' engagement to make sure both products were complementary.



**ORSIMPACT**

BARSOUM POLICY CONSULTING