

ALABAMA

August 2021

Census data determines the allocation of federal and other funds to vital social programs, guides redistricting, and informs research. Therefore, an accurate census that captures historically undercounted populations¹ is crucial for our democracy. Since 2016, a collaborative of philanthropic funders has worked to align and pool funding to build and strengthen the infrastructure needed to support a fair and accurate count.

The Democracy Funders Collaborative's Census Subgroup, which is the steering committee for the census funder collaborative, engaged ORS Impact as a partner to develop state-level reports that provide an overview of philanthropic efforts to promote the 2020 Census within and across the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This report provides a summary of census efforts for the State of Alabama based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=4).

¹We have opted to use the term "historically undercounted populations" in our narrative, but the term is interchangeable with "hard to count," which we use when our informants opted to do so

OVERVIEW GOING INTO 2020 CENSUS

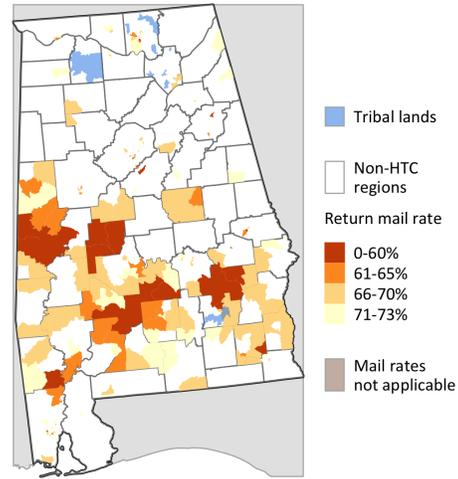
4,864,680

TOTAL POPULATION

738,253

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



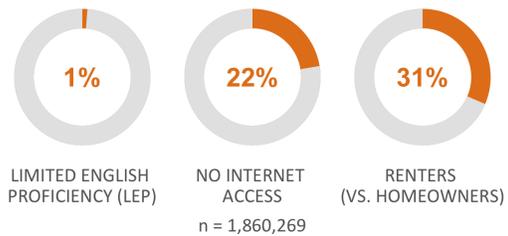
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

Population

Past analyses of Census data have consistently shown differences in self-response rates based on household or individual characteristics, indicating that certain populations are at higher risk of being undercounted. The following graphs show the distribution of selected populations within the state that have historically been more likely to be undercounted. Data for all maps and graphs provided by CUNY Graduate Center via the Census 2020 Hard to Count/Response Rate map at www.CensusHardToCountMaps2020.us.

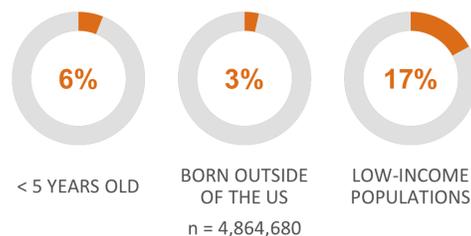
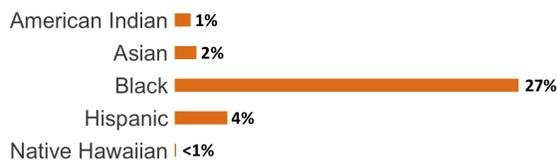
HOUSEHOLDS

Percent of total number of households in the state that have the following characteristics:



INDIVIDUALS

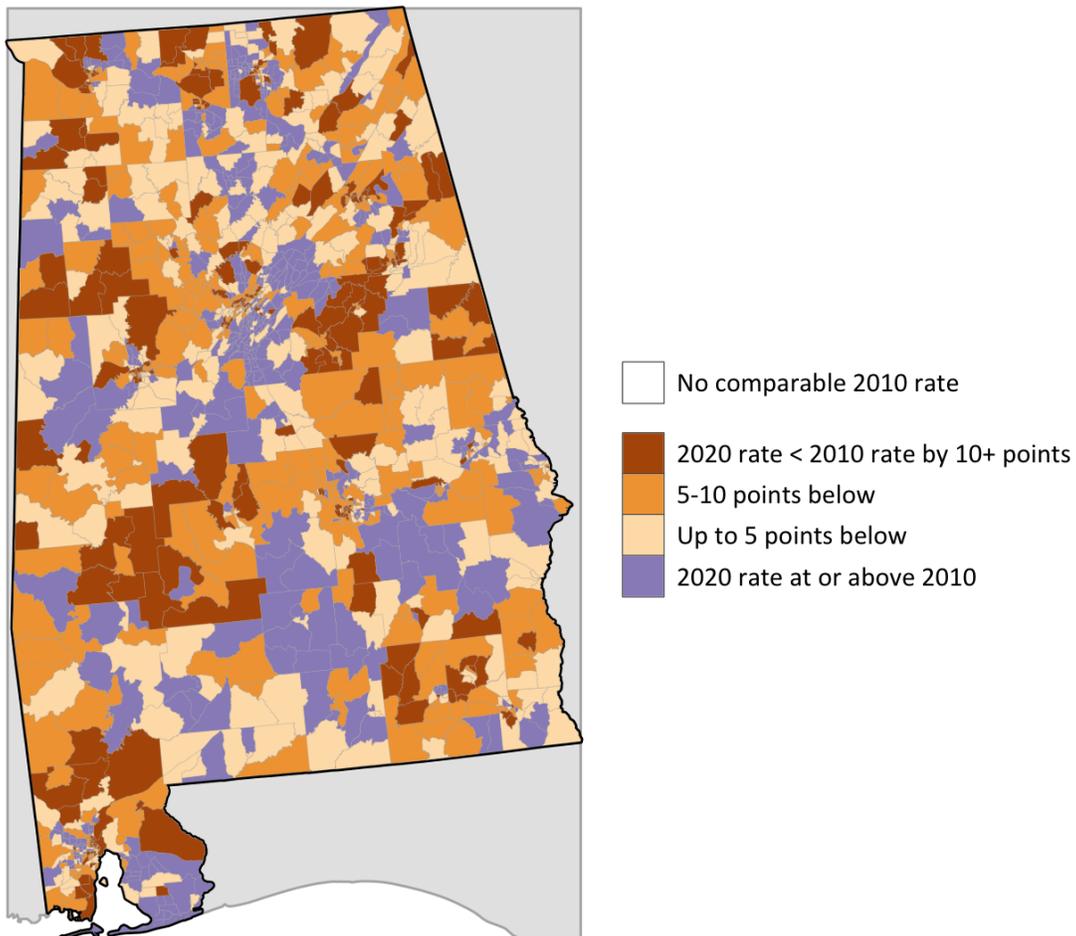
Percent of total number of individuals in the state that have characteristics of historically undercounted populations:



OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	63.6%	+1.1
2010	62.5%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Alabama's 2020 Census efforts were grounded in an active statewide collaboration between philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, small collaborations at the local level, and some support from and coordination with state-level and Census Bureau efforts. Governor Kay Ivey established the State Complete Count Committee, also called the Alabama Counts! 2020 Census Committee, in August 2018. Alabama Counts! was led by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and comprised public and private statewide organizations. ADECA and Alabama Counts! collaborated with the Census Bureau's Atlanta regional office and its Alabama partnership specialists, who helped counties form their own local 2020 Census complete count committees.

In October 2018, Alabama Giving, a statewide association of grantmaking organizations, formed a funder collaborative in support of Alabama Get Out the Count (GOTC) after learning about the opportunity for a matching grant from the Democracy Funders Collaborative's Census Equity Fund. Around the same time, spurred by a funding opportunity with NEO Philanthropy's Four Freedoms Fund, the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama (iHICA!) was also talking with VOICES for Alabama's Children, Alabama Arise, and a few other nonprofit partners in the state about coming together to support a fair and accurate census. Collectively the funders and nonprofit organizations decided that a funder-led collaborative would appeal to a broader set of nonprofit organizations than a collaborative led by a single nonprofit.

By January 2019, the funder group received the matching grant, established the pooled fund, and, with their nonprofit partners, formed the Alabama Hard-to-Count (HTC) Collaborative. The HTC Collaborative eventually comprised five local foundations, a C4 Donor Table, one regional foundation, and 22 nonprofit organizations. Involved foundations distributed communications to their own grantees and, through the Alabama Giving network, encouraged other funders to do the same.

Although there were some efforts aimed at acquiring state funds for the census, such advocacy did not appear to be a priority. In the summer of 2019, Alabama Possible and Alabama Power advocated for state investment in the census. The HTC Collaborative signed on to a letter drafted by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials and Unidos, and another letter from the national census funder collaborative and the Funders Census Initiative that was issued to Congress.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts²:

Actor	Role
Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs	Led Alabama Counts! 2020 Census Committee, also known as the State Complete Count Committee; served as liaison between the state of Alabama and the Census Bureau
Alabama Possible	Coordinated state efforts with community organizations and businesses; engaged in advocacy efforts to encourage state investment in census efforts
Alabama Giving (state grantmaker association), Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama	The core funders group that served as strategic advisors to the HTC Collaborative, setting granting strategy and vision, performing management oversight, and supporting collaboration staff; Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama also acted as fiscal sponsor
Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama	Led outreach to Hispanic and Latino immigrant communities in Central Alabama; with grant from the state, formed the Hispanic Complete Count Committee that funded smaller Latinx nonprofits and groups focused on GOTC with Spanish-speaking communities outside Central Alabama; collaborated with Census Bureau staff to reach Latinx communities
Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice	Led outreach to non-English-speaking immigrant communities in the northern, central, and southern regions of the state; coordinated with ¡HICA! to avoid duplicating efforts
VOICES for Alabama’s Children	Led outreach related to getting young children counted throughout the state
Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF)	Led outreach in 14 mostly rural counties through their network of “community associates” (local resident volunteers) in each county seat; served on State Complete Count Committee

²Data reflects the Census Bureau’s last update of self-response data (published in January 2021), which differs from the CUNY maps that use data from October 2020

Greater Birmingham Ministries	Led outreach related to families experiencing poverty in Central Alabama/Greater Birmingham area; also shared community outreach trainings (paid for with their grant) with all HTC Collaborative members
Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs	Led Alabama Counts! 2020 Census Committee, also known as the State Complete Count Committee; served as liaison between the state of Alabama and the Census Bureau

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

The Alabama census outreach efforts were supported by both state-appropriated funds, state and national philanthropy, and in-kind contributions. Overall, those involved in the efforts estimate that around \$2 million was leveraged to support census efforts within the state. Many nonprofit organizations received funding from both Alabama Counts! and the HTC Collaborative.

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach³

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<p>Philanthropy: \$855,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This pooled fund consisted of \$315,000 from the national Census Equity Fund, and \$540,000 from five local foundations, a C4 Donor Table, and a regional foundation. • About \$525,000 was used to support HTC Collaborative staffing and activities, including facilitating partnerships among community organizations; offering training and “best practice consultation” to nonprofit partners; providing event planning guidance and assistance; hosting regular Collaborative meetings; and coordinating with and supporting Alabama Counts! • The HTC Collaborative distributed approximately \$275,000 as grants primarily to nonprofit organizations; some were invited to apply for strategic reasons or because they had applied for a grant from the state and did not get it. • Some funding to nonprofit organizations reached local governments, such as a grant to the Birmingham Urban League that passed funding to the Jefferson County Complete Count Committee for outreach to historically undercounted communities. • Local foundations also supplemented the pooled fund with individual grants, such as the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham’s grant to the state Census Bureau to help them cover printing.
<p>State Government: \$1,195,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state gave grants to local government agencies and organizations through Alabama Possible, including the United Way of Central Alabama, YMCA of Tuscaloosa, VOICES for Alabama’s Children, ¡HICA!, and BBCF. • The state also invested heavily in broad-based communications materials and prioritized outreach in rural communities. A total of \$1,115,000 were invested by the state. • Cities also invested in census efforts; notably, Huntsville devoted \$50,000 and Montgomery \$30,000.

³Funding data should be taken as estimates. We included data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and Census Equity Fund (CEF) grants where applicable; other figures are estimates provided by key informants

<p>In-Kind Contributions: Unknown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the fiscal sponsor for the HTC Collaborative, the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama contributed services, including processing payroll, income, and checks for grantees, and grantee reports. • VOICES for Alabama’s Children, BBCF, ¡HICA!, and the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham donated office space, printing, and mailing to the HTC Collaborative.
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DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Alabama Counts! prioritized outreach to rural areas. Spurred by fears of losing a congressional seat, the state invested considerable resources in outreach to rural communities. In addition to giving matching grants to local government agencies and state and local nonprofit organizations, they funded a broad-based media campaign that included an online census toolkit with downloadable posters, door hangers, videos, graphics for use in social media posts, and other promotional materials. To boost self-response rates in rural areas near the end of the count (September), the state hosted a month-long “Alabama Census Bowl” in which 32 counties with the lowest response rates were invited to participate in a March Madness-style competition. Counties faced off against each other in a weekly bracket system, wherein only the counties with the bigger increase in self-response rates for that week advanced. Census Bowl winners received monetary rewards to benefit their public school systems: \$20,000 each for Elite Eight runner-ups, \$30,000 each for Final Four runner-ups, \$45,000 for second place, and \$65,000 for the Census Bowl champion. ADECA convened the State Complete Count Committee three times prior to awarding grants and not after that.

Many of the local complete count committees were very active, notably the one in Shelby County. Shelby County’s leader was a “census veteran” who hosted monthly meetings with a diverse group of county stakeholders that were lively and action-oriented. These meetings continued virtually after COVID-19 hit. In partnership with the city of Livingston in Sumter County, BBCF’s census associates and nonprofit partner set up a “no-contact census drive,” where people could drive up, complete their census form online, and drive away with a free spaghetti dinner and a chance to win \$100 in a drawing.

The HTC Collaborative designed their outreach to fill the gaps they observed within the communications plans of the Census Bureau and the national efforts. For example, when they learned where the Bureau was going to do a large media buy (TV or radio), they would buy Spanish language media in parts of the state they knew had Spanish-speaking populations. They also worked with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and small minority-owned radio stations to get the word out in those smaller communities.

To reach historically undercounted communities throughout the state, the HTC Collaborative leveraged the existing networks of their partners. ¡HICA! had strong relationships with Hispanic immigrants in Central

Alabama, and the Coalition for Immigrant Justice had three community organizers stationed in North, Central, and South Alabama. BBCF had a network of Community Associates in the 12 counties that make up the Alabama part of the cross-state Black Belt region. The foundation repurposed these volunteers as census associates, added two additional counties to the network, and paid the census associates a stipend of \$500 per month for their outreach efforts. BBCF also used their network of nonprofit grantee partners throughout the 24-county region.

The HTC Collaborative also partnered with institutions and organizations to leverage their existing infrastructure. To reach families, particularly in urban communities, the HTC Collaborative partnered with Teach for America, whose participants tend to work in Title I schools. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama Cooperative Extension, a partner of the HTC Collaborative, received a grant from the state to extend their office hours in all 67 counties to support census completion. Instead, the Extension worked with HTC Collaborative staff to educate community members through programs like 4-H. The pandemic also prevented the execution of planned outreach through partnerships with libraries, community centers, churches, and community colleges. VOICES for Children delivered messages to parents through social media networks that were regularly used to disseminate information that parents found helpful. Alabama Legal Services, a trusted voice, opened doors to their offices all over the state for census outreach and helped the HTC Collaborative gain access to county leaders.

The outreach supported by the HTC Collaborative targeted people and places specific to each community. For example, outreach to the Latinx community relied heavily on faith leaders, schools (e.g., English as a second language teachers, student services), and mothers. To reach rural African American community members, the HTC Collaborative arranged with community health clinics in the rural Black Belt area to establish census completion stations outside clinics so they could catch people leaving their appointments. And to reach members of the immigrant community, they planned to establish census completion stations at ¡HICA! and the Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice, which these community members had reported on a survey they considered “safe spaces.”

COVID-19 presented a significant disruption to in-person census outreach work, forcing organizations to use alternative means of engagement. Prior to COVID-19, census outreach plans included primarily in-person or relationship-based opportunities, such as door-knocking and opening trusted organizations’ doors for assisted online census completion. Once COVID-19 hit, tactics switched to mostly phone and text banking; interviews on local media and radio; and newspaper ads in local media (including Spanish language media), with some continued door-knocking by local “census captains” who helped people complete forms. Instead of their planned visits to church services, housing authorities, and other public places, the BBCF gave their census associates laptop computers, hotspots, and the software needed to call people on the telephone and complete their online census forms for them while they were on the phone. Because the census associates logged their work in Excel Cognito Forms, BBCF knows the associates assisted the count of 3,923 families and a total of 7,939 individuals in the 2020 Census.

Additional COVID-19 census outreach success stories funded through the HTC Collaborative showed the power of leveraging cross-sector partnerships to meet people where they are:

- **When receiving nutritional assistance.** Every United Way in the state received \$500 to \$1,000 grants to leverage their partnerships with food banks by including flyers with the food they distributed as part of a nutrition assistance program.
- **At work.** A small nonprofit organization called Baby Beds and Blankets created a “Drop Everything, Get Counted” campaign that invited every business owner in Macon County to allot an hour on the day of the campaign for all their employees to complete the census online. Computers were made available in the Tuskegee business district for those who needed access. The Macon County campaign was so successful that Alabama Counts!, the Business Council of Alabama, the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, and the Alabama chapter of the National Federation of Independent Businesses partnered to spread the “Drop Everything, Get Counted” Day of Action statewide.
- **While eating out.** C.H.O.I.C.E., a youth-focused nonprofit organization in Uniontown, Perry County (a poor town with a rich history of fighting for civil rights and environmental justice), partnered with local businesses to create meals called the “Census Special” to raise awareness of the census.

Reflection on challenges relate to engaging specific sectors, geographies, and logistics, many of which were exacerbated by COVID-19:

- **Corporate businesses were slow to understand the importance of the census.** The HTC Collaborative struggled to engage the State Complete Count Committee’s Economic Development/Industry Subcommittee until the final days of the count and had no success engaging banks and big retailers.
- **The decentralized and nonhierarchical structure of small rural churches made it hard to engage faith leaders statewide** because they did not know who to contact; exceptions were in Birmingham and the Black Belt region due to a couple partners’ existing connections with faith leaders.
- **Reaching the southern part of the state (e.g., Mobile and Baldwin) was particularly challenging.** An attempted partnership with the South Alabama Community Foundation started out well but broke down in the face of the census becoming politicized.
- **Reaching urban minority communities was particularly challenging,** partly due to difficulties creating a sense of urgency among mayors and partly due to cities frequently putting responsibility for local complete count committees in Departments of Planning, which did not seem to have the motivation to invest their limited capacity in census efforts (as Departments of Finance might).
- **Unreliable and inconsistent communication and support from the Census Bureau created many challenges.** Changing deadlines resulted in the HTC Collaborative having to reprint flyers and worry about putting inaccurate information online. The Collaborative learned relatively late from the Census Bureau that individual households were designated to respond using a particular method (online or via mailed form) after encouraging everyone to complete the census online. When people who had completed the census online received calls asking them to send in their forms, this caused confusion

as well as a loss of confidence in the integrity of the process. A combination of politicization and confusion on the part of the Census Bureau resulted in many local complete count committees not having the capacity, motivation, or support to be activated once they were formed.

- Limited broadband access was a perennial issue for those doing outreach in rural areas, though many found creative ways to mitigate this challenge.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Start early, fund fairly, and cultivate relationships among partners locally and statewide.** HTC Collaborative leadership said they wished they had started at least three years earlier. In the last six months of 2019, VOICES for Alabama’s Children and BBCF hosted regional forums in which community leaders across sectors (e.g., elected officials, nonprofit leaders, veteran resident leaders) came together to develop local outreach strategies and messaging that would resonate most with their respective populations. It was very fruitful, and the partners said they wished they had started that process earlier as well. Because the HTC Collaborative was able to fund their nonprofit partners fairly (based on need and breadth of work), resource sharing between nonprofits worked very well. Partners appreciated the regular HTC Collaborative meeting schedule, which included monthly meetings throughout the state, plus (initially) monthly meetings with each partner to identify opportunities for partners to coordinate efforts, collaborate, and leverage each other’s resources.
- **Engage community organizers and other well-connected individuals.** Funders learned from nonprofit partners the importance of giving stipends to community organizers, rather than only giving grants to organizations, if they want grassroots leadership, which is foundational to equitable outreach. This is harder for larger foundations, which tend to have more rigid funding guidelines, but was something the HTC Collaborative funders group could do.
- **Cultivate relationships with community foundations.** Community foundations get nervous about policy advocacy work but are better able to do it than private foundations. They need to understand that supporting the census is supporting civic engagement and is comparable to conversations about housing and health. Community foundations often already have good working relationships with public officials, and frequently their boards consist of a “who’s who” in the community, so they are obvious choices to call up elected officials. HTC Collaborative leaders believe that if they had tried educating community foundations earlier (“before the heat of the battle”) and made it more of a community conversation, they could have set the stage for census outreach being a civic engagement effort that is, by its nature, bipartisan and neutral.
- **To reach Latinx communities, it would have been better for the state to invest less in broad-based Spanish language media and more in targeted Spanish language media grounded in a better understanding of the state’s diverse Latinx communities.** ¡HICA! ended up having to create culturally responsive media that would make the census “more approachable” on their own. Latinx community outreach would have also benefited from more investment in leveraging ¡HICA!’s relationships with grassroots organizations and organizers across the state. The employment of trusted voices was particularly important considering the heightened fear of government in these communities due to the controversy surrounding the inclusion of a citizenship question on the census and in light of limited internet access in rural communities.

LOOKING FORWARD

Although the 28 nonprofit organizations and funders that constitute the HTC Collaborative had never worked together in a statewide initiative, the involved funders had worked together many times, including a large advocacy campaign related to another issue that involved collaborating with different statewide nonprofit organizations.

Building off momentum created by GOTC and Get Out the Vote, HTC Collaborative leaders are creating a state civic engagement table. Many of the same funders established a new funder collaborative so they can gain national support for Medicaid expansion by letting people know that the same philanthropic and nonprofit partners involved in the successful census collaboration would be participating.

DATA SOURCES

Representatives from the following organizations participated in interviews and/or contributed information for this report:

- Alabama Giving
- HTC Collaborative
- iHICA!
- BBCF