

# ALASKA

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 populations<sup>1</sup> 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 Alaska based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=4).

<sup>1</sup>We 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

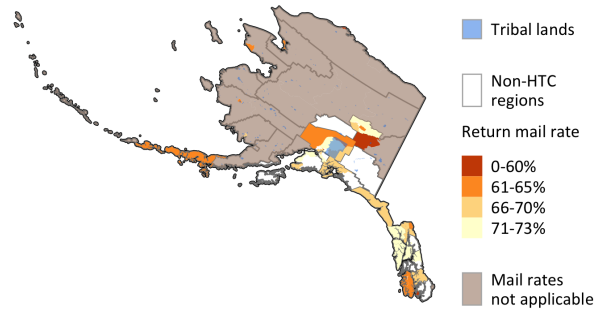
**738,516**

TOTAL POPULATION

**325,056**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



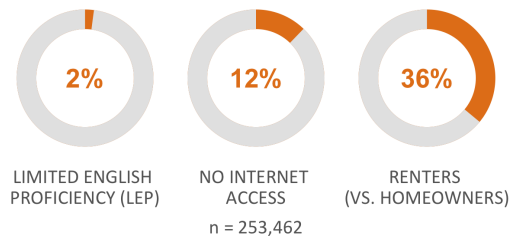
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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](http://www.CensusHardToCountMaps2020.us).

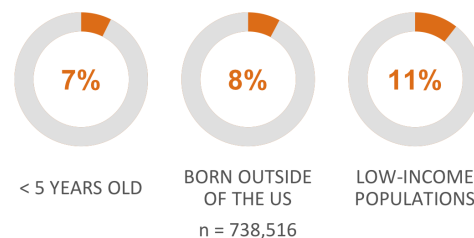
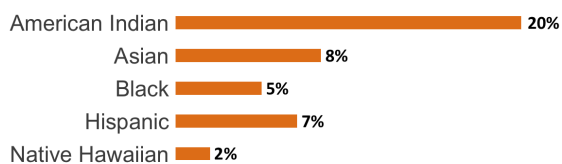
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

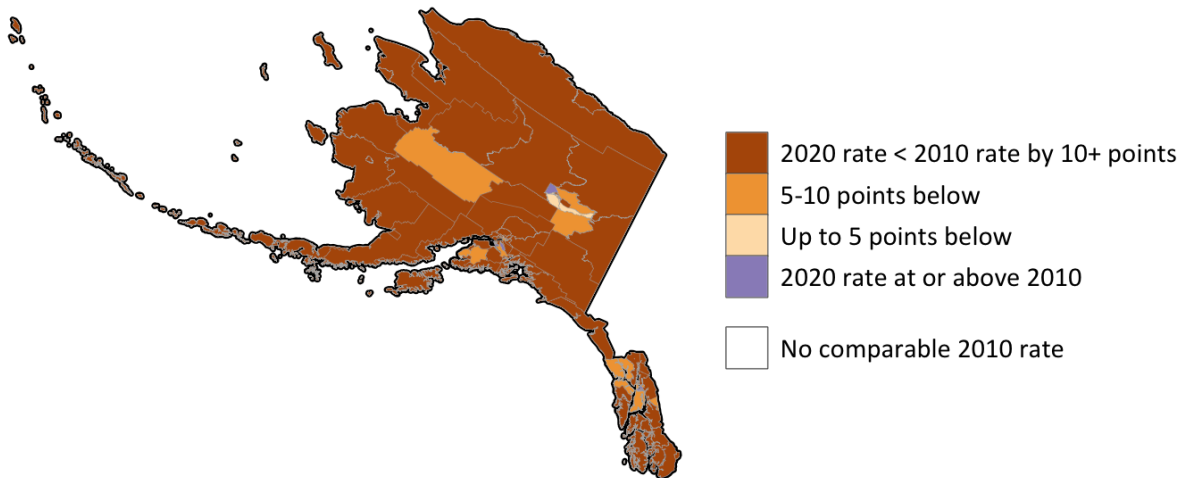




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

| YEAR        | SELF RESPONSE | CHANGE      |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>2020</b> | <b>54.7%</b>  | <b>-0.9</b> |
| 2010        | 55.6%         |             |

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

The Alaska Census Working Group was a cross-sector initiative including participation from a wide range of nonprofits, businesses, tribes, and state and local government entities aimed at promoting a complete and accurate count in Alaska.

The Alaska Census Working Group first came together in early 2018 and plans for a statewide census effort grew out of the group's early meetings. The administrative and facilitative backbone of the group was the Foraker Group, the state's nonprofit association that includes membership from across the state. As there was little documentation upon which to build the 2010 Census efforts, the Foraker Group convened various focus groups, community meetings, and brainstorming sessions to inform planning of efforts in the state. The state demographer was helpful in planning as well, as they provided an analysis of 2010 Census response data to inform decisions. A former state attorney general who had participated in the 2010 efforts also provided input.

One of the missions of the Working Group was to educate and mobilize organizations across the state around the importance of the census. Over time, the Working Group was able to engage with local complete count committees, local government partners, and nonprofits to encourage them in turn to educate and mobilize their own constituents. The Working Group engaged specifically with groups that had connections to historically undercounted populations. For example, the Native American Rights Fund, a tribal group with a long history working in Native communities, oversaw outreach to Indigenous groups and Native Alaskans around the census. The Working Group also partnered closely with the Census Bureau with the goal of connecting them to local experts that would help them be more effective in their outreach.

The relationship between the Working Group and the state government was somewhat complicated. Initially, then Governor Bill Walker allocated \$250,000 in state funding to census outreach efforts. However, when the new Governor Mike Dunleavy came into office, he decided to remove the Working Group from the State Complete Count Committee and administered a different amount of census funding. As a result, state funding did not ultimately go to support the efforts of the Working Group but was instead the purview of the State Complete Count Committee.

The Working Group implemented a wide range of activities to promote the 2020 Census in Alaska, including the Alaska Counts Campaign and a mini grants program aimed at injecting resources into local communities to conduct outreach activities.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts<sup>2</sup>:

| Actor                          | Role   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Foraker Group                  | The Foraker Group led and facilitated the Alaska Census Working Group.   |
| Alaska Census Working Group    | The Alaska Census Working Group was a cross-sector initiative that was the primary organizing structure for census efforts in the state.                 |
| State Complete Count Committee | The State Complete Count Committee consisted of multiple organizations to mobilize efforts on maintaining a fair and accurate census count in the state. |

## FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Overall, an estimated \$1,230,000 of state funding, philanthropic funding, and in-kind donations of staff time supported census efforts in the state.

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach<sup>3</sup>

| Funding Source and Amount               | Funding Purpose  |
|---|--|
| Philanthropy: <b>\$630,000</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Of this total, \$400,000 came from the national Census Equity Fund and \$230,000 came from local funders</li> </ul>   |
| State Government: <b>\$600,000</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Alaska state government contributed \$600,000 in funding to support census work. This reflects data from NCSL, although interviews only captured the original \$250,000 mentioned earlier in the report.</li> </ul> |
| In-Kind Contributions: <b>\$215,000</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Foraker Group donated \$215,000 of staff time toward organizing the work of the Working Group</li> </ul>  |

<sup>2</sup>Data 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

<sup>3</sup>Funding 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

# DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**Outreach to rural tribal communities was the centerpiece of the Alaska Census Working Group's efforts.**

Alaska is composed mostly of rural areas, and 90% to 95% of rural Alaska is home to large numbers of Native Alaskans and tribal members. Outreach to rural Alaska is a major challenge because of the large distances involved and the geographic isolation of many areas. Factors such as language, tribal customs, and local tribal relations needed to be taken into account to conduct effective outreach.

**The Alaska Census Working Group used a number of mechanisms to engage with rural communities.** To

ensure that census materials were translated into tribal languages, the coalition paid Native elders to translate census materials into the 27 languages spoken in Native communities. These materials were then distributed to communities via mailings from the campaign. Because the Census Bureau did not mail materials to PO Boxes, the coalition undertook mailings to these addresses to ensure coverage. In addition, groups used social media and public radio ads to engage with rural communities. The coalition also implemented a mini grants program to support community outreach activities in historically undercounted communities.

**In many tribal areas, groups relied more on in-person engagement.** Outreach to Native communities often relied on door knocking and in-person canvassing because of the lack of access to broadband internet. The COVID-19 pandemic made these efforts more difficult. In the remotest areas, operations were halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Alaska Census Working Group's approach was based on a campaign model in which education and community empowerment were priorities.** The coalition sought to build connections in rural areas first to set the stage for effective dissemination of census materials. Education of local community members so they would understand and be able to effectively message the importance of the census was important. To encourage participation, some groups would offer free food to improve turnout at census education events.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **The actors involved agreed on the need to start census planning as early as possible.** For outreach work to ramp up quickly, there is a need to build coalitions to implement the campaign, which takes time. In addition, as it requires advocacy to obtain state and philanthropic dollars to support this work, starting earlier also allows for more time for such efforts to bear fruit.
- **Because of the diversity of Alaskan communities, it is important to identify local trusted voices to undertake outreach.** Funding is necessary for groups to engage effectively in rural areas where infrastructure is limited, and travel costs can be high.
- **In-person efforts are important for effective outreach to rural communities.** These efforts were more difficult this time around because of the pandemic.
- **Translated and culturally relevant materials make it easier for non-English-speaking groups to participate.**

## LOOKING FORWARD

The groups involved hope that the lessons learned from this effort can be applied to future civic engagement efforts within the state. Many of the groups involved in the campaign continue to work on other issues across the state.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Foraker Group (n=2)
- Native American Rights Fund (n=2)