

State Efforts to Promote the 2020 Census: **CROSS-STATE ANALYSIS**

Prepared by ORS Impact
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BACKGROUND

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 is crucial for our democracy. Beginning in 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 2020 Census.

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.

In developing the state reports, ORS Impact conducted interviews with nonprofit, philanthropic and government actors involved in census efforts within each state (n=142). We also relied on review of secondary data sources (e.g., reports, websites, media reports) to glean additional detail on state census efforts.

In this report, we provide a summary of themes and observations from looking across the state reports, including:

- Structure of efforts
- Funding to support census
- Lessons learned, including successful strategies
- Enabling conditions and challenges

STRUCTURE of efforts

- **2020 Census efforts within the states were built on existing infrastructure and relationships.** Typically, those leading census efforts within states represented well-established nonprofits, government, or philanthropic organizations. State census coalitions and campaigns often grew out of existing networks (e.g., civic engagement tables, nonprofit coalitions, funders groups).
- **At the same time, there were also intentional efforts to forge new and/or deeper partnerships to enhance census efforts in nearly all states.** In particular, actors involved in census efforts often sought to identify, form relationships with, and funnel resources to smaller grassroots organizations to conduct on-the-ground efforts. In many states, census efforts created space for increased cross-sector collaboration between government, nonprofits, and philanthropy and allowed actors to work together in ways they had not previously done.
- **States census coalitions differed in their leadership and governance structure.** A common structure for groups working on the 2020 Census was to have a central group or hub organization that would play an organizing convening role and push out information and resources to those involved in the larger campaign. There was variation in the group or organization playing this central convening role (e.g., State Complete Count Committee, non-profit organizations, funders group). However, in some states, there were multiple regional efforts that shared this structure with more limited overall governance at the state level.

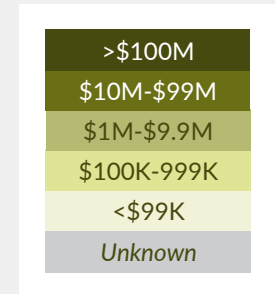
- **Those involved in census efforts in states were typically most concentrated in major metro areas, and many campaigns also focused efforts on major population centers.** There were also concerted efforts to involve partners in rural areas, but many actors noted that it was difficult to recruit partners in these areas. Lack of access to technology and broadband in rural and remote areas also made it more difficult to outreach to these communities.
- **State government support for state census efforts was more common in states with Democratic leadership, with some exceptions.** States with Democratic governors or legislators, were more likely to establish and fund complete count committees. Conversely, in Republican-led states, support for the census was less common.
- **In states with well-established philanthropic communities, census efforts were generally better resourced.**
- **Many groups made efforts to include historically undercounted communities in the planning, governance and implementation of state census efforts.** Many groups held community meetings, included community-based organizations and grass roots in planning, and gave flexibility to partners on the ground to engage historically undercounted communities in the way that would be most appropriate.
- **Investment in websites and social media campaigns supported 2020 Census communications.** The creation of websites with lots of census related information and resources including infographics and other downloadable resources was common. This infrastructure supported grassroots efforts, enabling leaders to get information and adapt it for their use. There was also investment to leverage social media for outreach.

FUNDING to support the census

\$217M **\$10.75M** **\$1.48M** \$12.5K

MAX MEAN MEDIAN MIN

Circle color represents the amount of funding that each state generated to support census efforts.



This map illustrates the estimated totals for **state** and **philanthropic** funds based on our data sources by state. **Overall, \$516 million were invested, and 15% (\$75 million) came from state philanthropy.** State funds include city/county funds where that data was available.

Estimates are not comprehensive; some states did not provide funding information and others provided estimates based on what was allocated, while noting that COVID-19 pandemic response may have affected actual amounts spent.

LESSONS LEARNED

Successful Strategies

- Building strong relationships early on helped set the stage for successful adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Choosing appropriate census messengers, i.e., members of communities.
- Grassroots organizations leading efforts on the ground to get out the count.
- Leveraging community foundation networks within a state.
- Leveraging networks/types of organizations/people who are established across rural and other harder to reach areas, e.g., libraries, legal aid service centers, Teach for America volunteers, free/community health care clinics.
- Leveraging COVID response to share materials/information; also gave opportunities to strengthen messaging by tying census to funds for services people were currently receiving.
- Census caravans were low-touch ways to get people interested in the census; they were especially effective during the lockdown when most people were home.
- Philanthropy and non-profit networks can be nimble where government cannot, which was crucial for meeting emergent needs.
- Investing in culturally competent/local messages and messengers.
- Greater involvement from the philanthropy is needed to support ongoing civic engagement efforts, not just during the census but on an ongoing basis.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Constructive participation of state government enhanced efforts; conversely, state government opposing census efforts was not helpful.
- National infrastructure enhanced efforts. Groups spoke of the value of the census subgroup and materials from CUNY and FCCP.
- The diversity of the coalitions extended the reach of efforts.
- Earlier investment across multiple dimensions lead to more successful outreach efforts.

CHALLENGES

- The COVID pandemic created many challenges requiring changes in strategies for census outreach.
- Changing timelines created confusion.
- Citizenship question eroded trust among immigrant groups.
- Bureaucratic rules (e.g., sometimes state funding rules) made it hard to get funding where it was needed.
- The same barriers that make populations historically undercounted also hamper outreach efforts, including lack of broadband, long distances in rural areas and distrust of government makes outreach harder.