

# MAINE

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 Maine 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

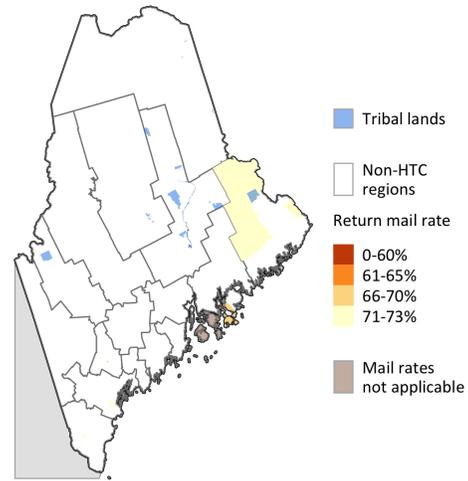
**1,332,813**

TOTAL POPULATION

**51,714**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



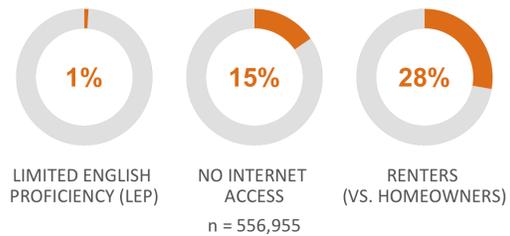
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

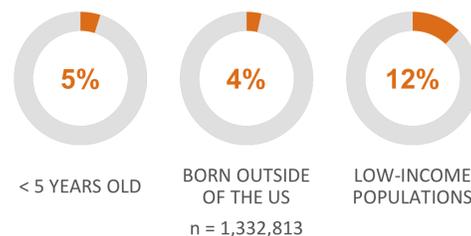
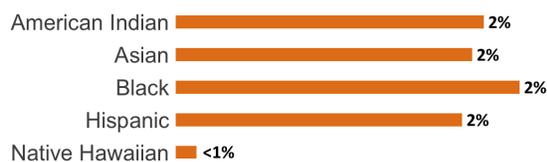
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

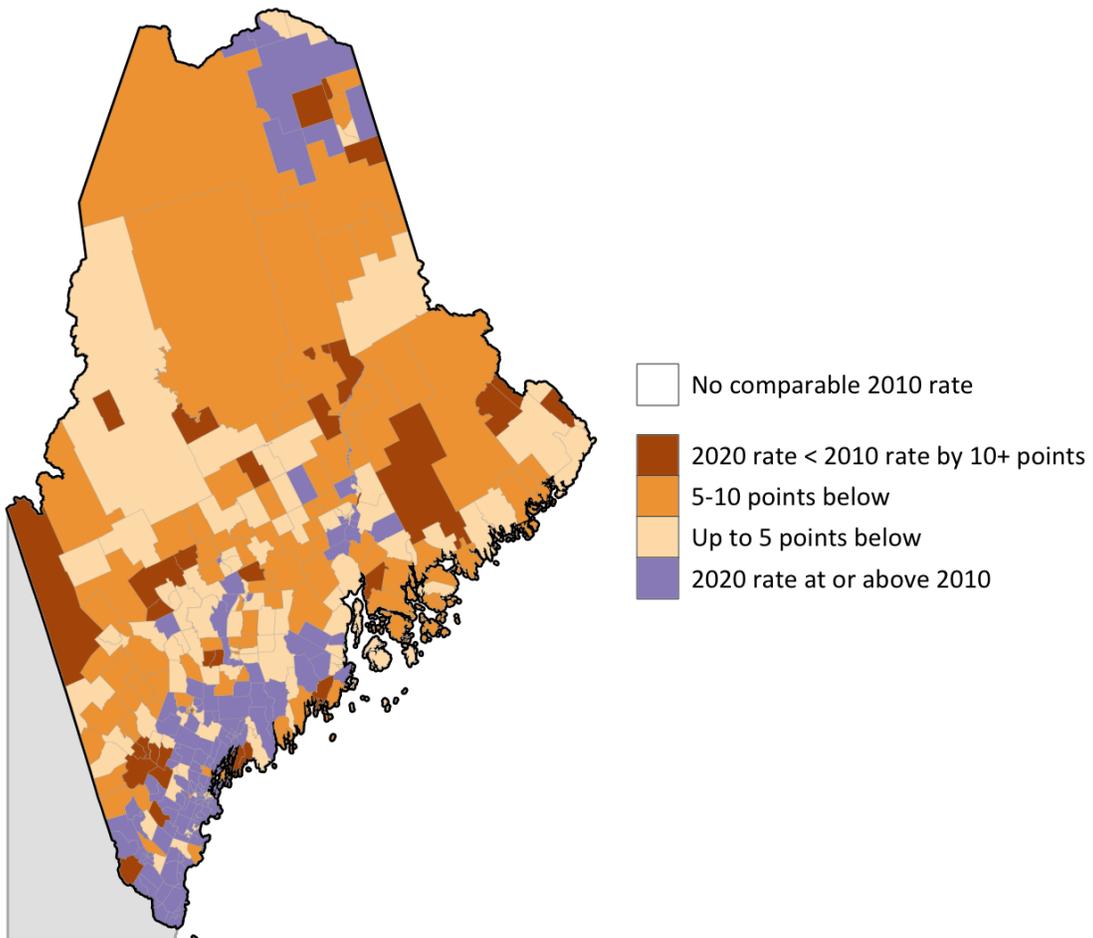




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>58.2%</b>	<b>+0.8</b>
2010	57.4%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010





## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Maine, a low-population state with most of its inhabitants concentrated in small urban centers in its southern region or otherwise dispersed throughout small rural towns, has a naturally decentralized infrastructure that led to an ad hoc coordinated effort in support of the 2020 Census. Although some key actors began planning census work as early as 2018, mobilization of most groups began in late 2019. The Maine Association of Nonprofits (MANP) organized other leading philanthropic and nonprofit organizations to lobby the state for budget allocation of census efforts early on, but efforts to secure funds were unsuccessful. Governor Janet Mills instead announced the formation of a State Complete Count Committee in October 2019, encouraging bureaus across its administration to support complete count efforts. Although the State Complete Count committee was slow to develop and did not generate much census activity as a group, many bureaus responded to the need and leveraged capacities for census outreach.

Other leading organizations were working in tandem to address census funding needs. Leadership within Maine Philanthropy Center's Philanthropic Network Advocacy Committee had identified a need for philanthropic support of state efforts early on based on lessons learned from Maine's implementation of the Affordable Care Act. With guidance from the advocacy committee and support of state philanthropy, The Bingham Program established a pooled fund in August 2019 and began awarding grants to support complete count activities by the end of the year, focusing on funding outreach to undercounted populations.

With limited resources and many existing issue-based networks, key actors collaborated to leverage each other's capacities for resource generation and information exchange while keeping most census activities siloed across networks. MANP hosted a workshop with the US Census Bureau partnership specialist in December 2019 to facilitate cross-pollination of census campaign strategies among organizations with interest in a complete count and to educate groups on census questionnaire assistance rules and regulations. In critical support of localized efforts, the US Census Bureau partnership specialists remained highly involved and responsive by facilitating the sharing of resources among all the key actors, helping nonprofits and local governments establish local complete count committees, and working closely with census pooled fund grantees to further optimize outreach strategies for undercounted groups. The League of Women Voters of Maine also identified a need for more coordinated efforts to improve census participation and began mobilizing within their own network of member organizations, further activating nodes of lateral census activity across the state.

Many of the most active organizations involved in increasing census participation were children's advocacy, health care, and social service organizations such as the Maine Children's Alliance and the YMCA, whose constituents are often part of marginalized and undercounted populations. Other partners included churches, affordable housing groups, and organizations representing the interests of rural, elder, and immigrant populations. Despite the organizations' best efforts, Maine's historically dispersed population results in

reliance on the US Census Bureau’s Update Leave and Update Enumerate programs to reach households in isolated locations by dropping off census packets at the doorstep or conducting the census in person, respectively.

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

Actor	Role
<b>League of Women Voters of Maine</b>	Membership-based organization focused on democracy reform work; shares administrative staff with Maine Citizens for Clean Elections and Democracy Maine, a staffed umbrella organization for democracy work. Focused on leveraging their own network of partner organizations to promote the census and support development of outreach efforts, including messaging, throughout the state.
<b>Maine Association of Nonprofits</b>	Large statewide group that advocated for state funds, circulated philanthropic funding opportunities for census activities to nonprofits, facilitated meetings, and helped develop outreach strategies. It became a complete count committee for nonprofits and routinely kept partners informed through its 9,000-member email listserv.
<b>The Bingham Program/Maine Philanthropy Center’s Philanthropic Network Advocacy Committee</b>	The Bingham Program, a charitable trust held at Tufts Medical Center, organized a new pooled fund for the 2020 Census. With guidance from the Maine Philanthropy Center’s Philanthropic Network Advocacy Committee, grants were made available to support the work of community-based organizations willing to infuse census education and outreach efforts into their existing work.
<b>Maine Children’s Alliance</b>	Statewide Kids Count organization and grantee of the census pooled fund that advocated for complete count efforts of young children. The organization leveraged its partner network of childcare providers and other issue organizations as credible messengers that could engage their service recipients for census education and participation.

<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

# FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Resources for Maine census efforts came from a combination of state- and national-level philanthropy and some unknown amount of in-kind contributions of materials and staff time. Overall, those involved in the efforts estimate that over \$180,000 in resources was leveraged within the state, mostly in philanthropic dollars but also through an unknown amount of in-kind contributions.

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

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<b>Philanthropy:</b> <b>+\$180,000</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bingham Program gathered \$170,000 from nine different funders around the state to support the work of about 14 small nonprofits working on complete count activities across the state, focusing on organizations that were either led by or serving undercounted communities. A second round of individual funder grants for organizations expressing particular need yielded approximately \$10,000 in additional support.</li> <li>• The Annie E. Casey Foundation granted some unknown amount to Maine Children’s Alliance, one of their Kids Count organizations.</li> </ul>
<b>State Government:</b> \$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state chose not to allocate funding to support the work of the State Complete Count committee.</li> </ul>
<b>In-Kind Contributions:</b> <b>Unknown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many organizations contributed staff time and other resources to census efforts within the state, including volunteer translation services and children’s advocacy census materials from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.</li> </ul>

<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

**Organizations and the state government leveraged their status as “credible messengers” in a large effort to promote census participation leading up to National Census Day.** Key actors worked within and across their networks to produce thoughtful messaging of census information. The state administration used existing public engagement tools to promote the census, such as promotion through statewide mailers and refashioning highway safety billboard signs used by the Department of Transportation. Statewide associations encouraged their network of issue-based organizations to creatively engage their constituents through regular programming. For example, Maine Children’s Alliance leveraged existing partnerships with Head Start programs and early childcare providers to encourage them to share census information with parents, and the Maine Adult Education Association advertised census reminders on mailers it regularly distributes to school districts throughout the state to reach thousands of people. Social media campaigns and newsletters were commonly used for census promotion and partner communications.

**Outreach strategies were uniquely affected by unreliable internet access and the isolation of the state’s sparsely populated northern and eastern regions.** Before the onset of the pandemic, a leading strategy was to leverage the capacity of libraries across the state to organize internet access “questionnaire assistance centers” and direct library staff to help the public navigate census instructions and concerns. Despite organizations’ best collective outreach efforts in absence of the leading strategy, Maine’s response rate did not significantly improve until after the US Census Bureau reinstated census packet drop-off operations, Update Leave, in June 2020 and then implemented Update Enumeration later. Key actors involved questioned the credibility of these operations, as some individuals in targeted communities reportedly neither received the expected packet drop nor engaged with an enumerator.

**Undercounted populations were engaged through direct canvassing and engagement with trusted community organizations serving those groups with the support of philanthropic funding.** Larger organizations such as MANP and The Bingham Program provided training and facilitated brainstorming sessions to help community-based groups serving those populations with outreach strategies and messaging. These undercounted populations included elders through the Area Agency on Aging; new American communities through the Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center; rural and agricultural workers through the community-based group Mano a Mano; young children, people with low income, residents of tribal nations, students on higher education campuses, and rural populations. Key actors worked with smaller community-based organizations to provide translated materials and services at events. The census pooled fund enabled critical outreach work by a diverse set of grassroots organizations targeting pockets of undercounted communities, such as engagement with a small Somali community in Lewiston and county-level outreach to the tribal nation of Passamaquoddy by the Sunrise County Economic Council, based in one of the more rural and impoverished counties.

**The lack of government leadership and funding brought cascading challenges with infrastructure development, outreach strategy, and messaging.** The delayed and unfunded formation of the State Complete Count committee detracted from its ability to develop a united strategy among otherwise highly engaged and active partners. Despite their innovation and resourcefulness, organizations struggled to craft their own range of messaging, including responses to census misinformation, clear instruction for those without internet access, and targeted messages for undercounted groups with a distrust of government due to immigration or privacy concerns.

**COVID-19 affected original outreach strategies aimed at reaching undercounted populations, including plans to set up mobile hot spots, organize census stations at libraries, and send census information packets home from school.** The shift to online and distance outreach created new opportunities, however, including distribution of information through food bank boxes, childcare and other social service provider resource packets, materials at doctors' offices, and digital engagement through social media and online church services.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Maine’s rural, dispersed population has created a decentralized infrastructure of many active organizations which readily share capacities and resources.** Resources were effectively shared across organizations and networks in a united effort to scale census outreach with patchwork funding and minimal guidance. In many cases, organizations shared staffing or had employees previously staffed at partner organizations. Its infrastructure benefited from existing relationships and a seamless exchange of information across groups and sectors.
- **Civic engagement work will likely remain as a localized, town-by-town effort, and adoption of new technologies will likely remain slow,** as demonstrated by the recent adoption of online legal processes for residents (e.g., online auto registration and filing of state taxes). Census strategies should reflect the realities of the state.
- **Undercounted communities were best engaged through trusted, credible messengers** who could understand the fears of certain groups and leverage their trust to encourage census participation. Examples of such groups include community-based organizations or childcare and social service providers. Future infrastructure development efforts could benefit from more strategic leadership and engagement with grassroots organizations.
- **More state government leadership and engagement, and an earlier start of efforts, could have enabled organizations to focus their limited capacities on improving census participation.** Maine’s strength lies in its networks of distributed people and organizations, which could have more readily implemented strategies had there been state-appropriate plans and toolkits in place. The lack of time affected the ability to engage with nonprofits outside the immediate networks and build effective strategies for reaching undercounted groups.
- **Census partnership specialists in Maine had a history of state civic engagement work across sectors,** which helped develop strong collaborations and allowed rapid scaling of census activities despite limited resources. Although most relationships across civic engagement groups already existed, new partnerships with health care and social service providers led to more lateral support of voter engagement work later on.
- **Census pooled funding successfully enabled community-based organizations to better engage with undercounted communities for complete count efforts,** but there is still a need for state funds and room for philanthropy to better advocate for state engagement in census activities.
- **A flood of funds to philanthropy for pandemic relief efforts created a new relationship with Maine philanthropy and the governor’s office,** which has spurred conversations about how philanthropy can support, not supplant, the work of government.

## LOOKING FORWARD

2020 Census efforts in Maine built on existing infrastructure, and key actors shared resources in mutual support of independent activities throughout their networks. The creation of a pooled fund was successful, and key actors intend to strengthen this structure by both reestablishing it through a community foundation and beginning pooling sooner to establish waves of funding rounds in preparation for the next census. Stronger connections between philanthropy and the state have also created opportunities for stronger advocacy of state budget allocations for census work, which could ultimately lead to greater capacities for a truly coordinated complete count effort.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Maine Association of Nonprofits
- Maine Children’s Alliance
- The League of Women’s Voters of Maine/Democracy Maine
- The Bingham Program