

MASSACHUSETTS

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 Massachusetts based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=3).

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

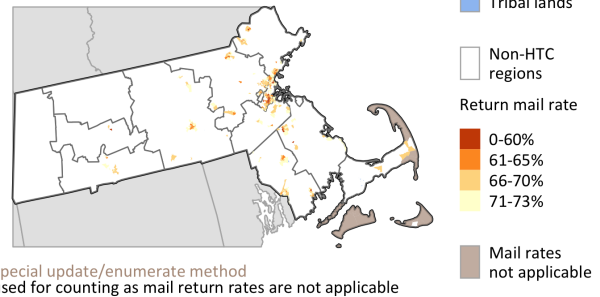
6,830,193

TOTAL POPULATION

1,652,145

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY

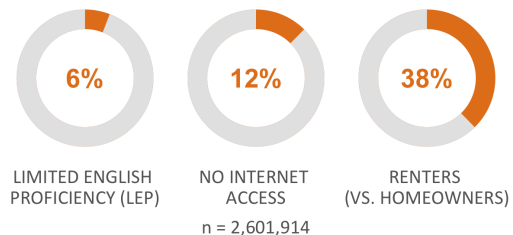


Population

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.

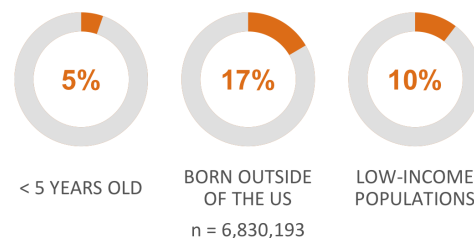
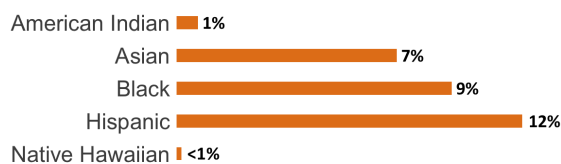
HOUSEHOLDS

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:

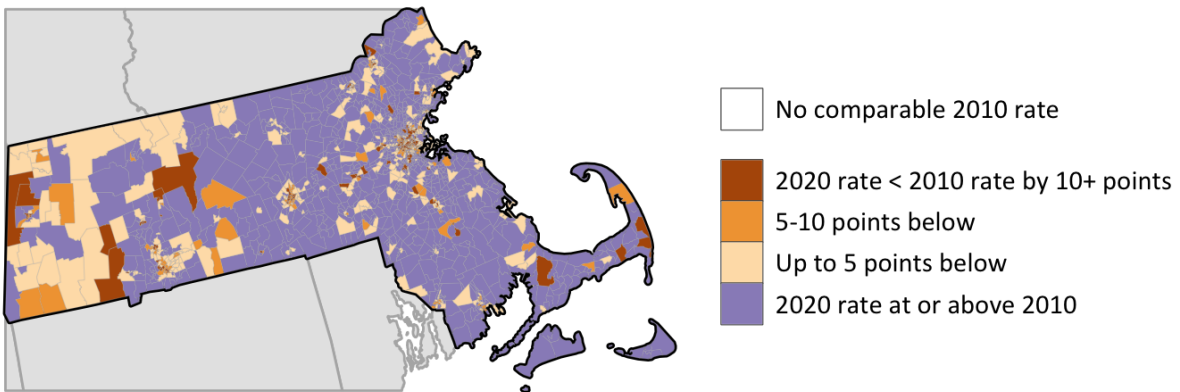




OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	69.4%	+0.6
2010	68.8%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010





STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

In July of 2017, the Access Strategies Fund convened the first meeting of a steering committee of local philanthropic funders to plan a statewide response to the 2020 Census. These early conversations resulted in the formation of the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund, a statewide collaborative of partners working to increase participation in the 2020 Census, focusing specifically on communities that are at risk of being undercounted. The group ultimately brought together 17 funders, with 5 funders agreeing to serve as the primary working group. In addition to funders, the collaborative also invited nonprofit community partners, including Massachusetts Voter Table, to join its efforts. Massachusetts Voter Table (previously called Massachusetts Count) received a grant from the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund to coordinate 2020 Census outreach efforts with grassroots organizations statewide. Another important nonprofit partner was the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, which leveraged the capacity of some of the larger statewide nonprofit organizations and policy groups to support census efforts. Having broad representation from philanthropy, grassroots organizations, and community groups strengthened the collaborative's census outreach efforts.

Philanthropy Massachusetts was an active member and served as the fiscal sponsor who managed the budget and grant process for the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund and handled disbursement of grant dollars to local organizations and advocates. Around 80 groups were funded by the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund to conduct outreach. The actors involved in the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund's efforts coordinated closely with other parallel efforts in the state, including the State Complete Count Committee and representatives of the Census Bureau. The State Complete Count Committee did not form until late 2019 but once their efforts ramped up they coordinated with the Census Equity Fund's more grassroots efforts on a regular basis. The Census Bureau officers in Massachusetts were accessible, responsive, and collaborative, regularly attending planning meetings with other groups in the state to ensure alignment of efforts. The high level of collaboration was key to the success of census outreach efforts in Massachusetts. The University of Massachusetts Boston was also an important evaluation partner, adviser, and advocate, drawing on their many years in the census community advocacy space.

Efforts in Massachusetts benefited from the experience and lessons of organizations that had worked on previous censuses. For example, the Access Strategies Fund and others involved in 2020 Census efforts had also been involved in a previous iteration of the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund related to the 2010 Census. The structure used to organize 2020 Census efforts built on 2010 Census infrastructure in the sense that the funders' collaborative pooled their resources to fund outreach efforts. The experiences of groups involved in the last census informed decisions about the structure of 2020 Census efforts. For example, the decision to invite nonprofit organizations such as Massachusetts Voter Table to participate in the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund came about in part because of funder-led experiences during the last

census. State funding dedicated to outreach in 2010 was greater than in 2020, which meant there were fewer resources available for outreach to communities at risk of being undercounted for the 2020 Census.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts²:

Actor	Role
Massachusetts Census Equity Fund and Philanthropy Massachusetts	The steering committee coordinated all efforts among the five participating foundations: Access Strategies Fund, the Boston Foundation, Episcopal City Mission, Urban Fund, and the Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation. Philanthropy Massachusetts served as the fiscal agent.
Massachusetts Voter Table (including a coalition of community and grassroots organizations) and Massachusetts Nonprofit Network	Two nonprofit organizations actively involved in efforts, representing community groups and coordinating local census outreach efforts.
State Complete Count Committee	Led by Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, the State Complete Count Committee coordinated efforts to promote the census on behalf of the state.

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

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Overall, roughly \$8.1 million in philanthropic and state and local dollars funded 2020 Census efforts in Massachusetts

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach³

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
Philanthropy: \$1.5 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund provided \$1.5 million total in grants to 85 organizations across the state. Funding also provided for development of a website to support the efforts. The RFP process was open and the funding process focused special attention on organizations that were working in geographic areas and populations that are historically undercounted.
State and Local Government: \$6.65 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Conference of State Legislatures reported \$5 million in state funding. Informants reported that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state government allocated \$3 million dollars to 2020 Census outreach efforts. Most of these funds were granted to nonprofit and grassroots organizations. Due to bureaucratic hurdles, much of the state funding did not arrive at nonprofit organizations until early/mid 2020, toward the end of the 2020 Census deadline. Some funds did not reach organizations involved in outreach and not all funding was disbursed because of delays. • Local governments provided \$1 million to support local census outreach efforts.
In-Kind Contributions: Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple organizations across the state donated time and effort to support 2020 Census efforts.

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

DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Investment in a website and social media campaign supported 2020 Census communications. The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund supported creation of a website with census-related information, including infographics and other downloadable resources. This infrastructure supported grassroots efforts, enabling leaders to access important information and adapt it for their use. There was also investment in leveraging social media for outreach. The Census Equity Fund sought to ensure that materials were translated into multiple languages to improve access to immigrant communities where English is not the primary spoken language.

The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund provided grants and training to local grassroots organizations that carried out efforts on the ground. In late 2019/early 2020, the collaborative partners trained leaders of community-based organizations in how to communicate the importance of the 2020 Census. Grassroots organizations in turn focused on identifying leaders that would be effective messengers within their communities. This effort included unions and other groups who had lists of individuals in working-class communities of color to do phone banking and text messaging to their members to complete the census. Grantees also gathered to share information about what was working and what was not. These meetings helped keep communication open among the grantees and those working on the ground.

In addition to in-person engagement, texting and phone banking were also important tactics for engaging with historically undercounted populations. The level of coordination of the phone and text banking was very successful and made a difference in getting out the count in undercounted communities

Data and conversations with community groups informed decisions about where to focus efforts to reach undercounted communities and populations. The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund used 2010 Census response data and real-time 2020 Census data to inform their efforts. They also considered shifting demographic trends in Massachusetts (e.g., migration of the urban poor out of Boston due to high housing prices).

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for grantees, requiring changes in strategies for census outreach. All in-person events and activities became virtual. A successful pandemic-related tactic integrated Get Out the Count efforts with wellness checks, food distribution, and other services—particularly in disabled and elderly communities. Use of social media was also very successful. Since many of the grassroots groups struggled during the pandemic, the funders raised \$100,000 to make rapid grants to groups that were working in areas that were hardest hit by the pandemic. The funders also had to shift their views and become more flexible to allow grantees to change strategies because of the pandemic. This flexibility proved to be effective in the COVID-19 environment.

Other challenges also hampered efforts. For example, the ever-changing census deadline created more financial challenges for grantees who now had to stretch their funding over a longer period of time. The debate around the addition of the citizenship question to the census was disruptive even though the effort to include the question was ultimately unsuccessful. Actors noted that anti-immigrant sentiment and lack of support from the federal government created additional challenges.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Close collaboration around communication allowed partners to share a cohesive 2020 Census message.** The investment in communications infrastructure early on drove consistent and effective messaging across groups. Having a dedicated director to oversee all advocacy and communication efforts was very important for holding all the pieces together.
- **Building strong relationships early on helped set the stage for successful adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Early on, the funders brought grantees together in regional venues that proved to be effective for building relationships among groups who did not know each other previously, which promoted collaboration. The initial relationships they built within the coalition allowed members to trust each other and align their interests, which ultimately allowed for a quick response by the steering committee. The relationships that were built prior to the pandemic were instrumental for transitioning to the new, virtual reality. The trusted messenger model worked well in getting the messaging out to communities that are most impacted by the census.
- **Despite a collaborative structure, efforts in the state were not entirely aligned, sometimes leading to challenges.** Some groups were funded by more than one funder and some groups did not receive any funding at all. As a result, not everyone had access to all the information and events. It would be beneficial to better coordinate funding sources to have more equitable distribution of funds.
- **State government could have played a stronger role by providing more resources sooner and collaborating more closely with other groups.** In some cases, state funding arrived too late to be put to best use. If the state had chosen to provide funds via the mechanisms in use by groups already working on the census (i.e., via the model that the Census Equity Fund was using), this could have led to a smoother and more rapid process. Better collaboration with the state could have greatly enhanced efforts.
- **Starting earlier could have allowed for greater reach.** The actors believe that getting an earlier start on coordination and building relationships and support could have led to even more success.
- **The coalition's diversity extended the reach of efforts.** The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund worked more effectively than in the past because it included both funders and nonprofit organizations on the steering committee; only funders were involved in the last census. Including organizations who were already working on the ground helped to ensure better strategy for the overall group. Grassroots leaders were invited and compensated for reviewing grant proposals, which led to selection of more effective partners.

LOOKING FORWARD

This is the second time that the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund collaborative has worked together on census efforts and there are already plans for the group to continue for the 2030 Census. The infrastructure and relationships they built are strong and are already being leveraged in current redistricting efforts. In addition, the capacity for phone banking that is now in place can be leveraged for future community engagement efforts.



DATA SOURCES

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

- Access Strategies Fund
- Massachusetts Voter Table
- University of Massachusetts Boston