

# NEW MEXICO

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 New Mexico based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=5).

<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

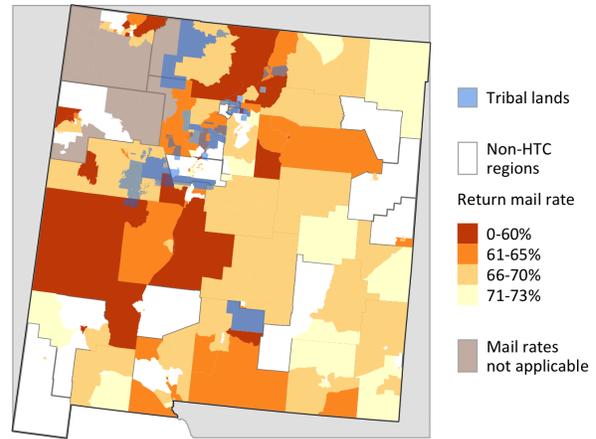
**2,092,434**

TOTAL POPULATION

**1,012,309**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



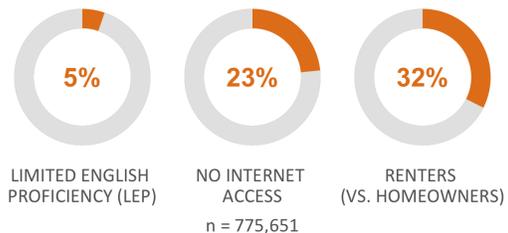
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

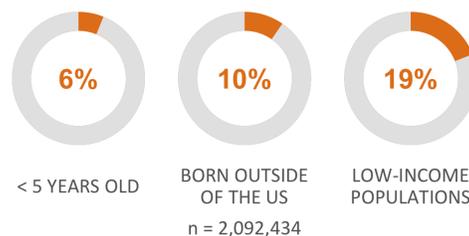
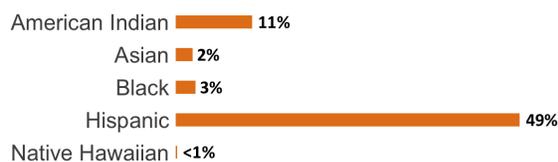
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

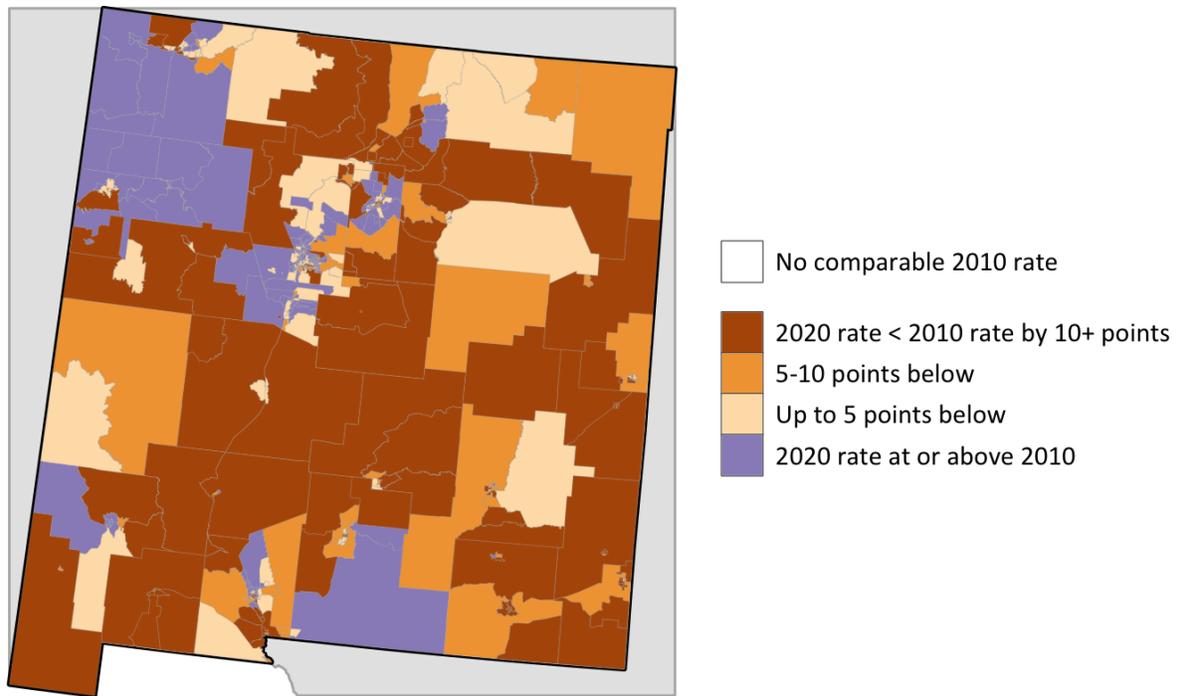




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>58.7%</b>	<b>-1.3</b>
2010	60.0%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

New Mexico's 2020 Census efforts were grounded in multiple complementary collaborative efforts by the state government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and Native American groups, as well as significant investment in high-quality, targeted communications outreach. Efforts in the state began in 2017 and stretched until the conclusion of the census in October 2020. The structure of census efforts evolved over time, beginning as a small group of actors and developing into an ecosystem that supported multiple coordinated streams of work within the state. Key milestones in the development of efforts in the state are detailed below.

Efforts began with a small group of actors working on Local Update of Census Addresses Operation (LUCA). LUCA is a voluntary opportunity for tribal, state, and local governments to review and update the Census Bureau's residential address list for their jurisdiction prior to each decennial census. In 2017, the Thornburg Foundation and the University of New Mexico's Geospatial and Population Studies (GPS) research center (home of the New Mexico state demographer) came together to discuss the importance of engaging in a robust LUCA Operation because of the high number of unconfirmed addresses in their state that would require Update Leave, primarily on tribal lands. Update Leave is an operation to drop census invitation packets at households in areas where most households may not receive mail at their physical address. The LUCA effort, led by GPS, resulted in 80,000 new addresses on the US Census Bureau list.

Energized by the early success of the LUCA Operation, and leveraging a matching grant from the Delivering on the Dream network, local foundations came together to form the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group to support further census efforts in the state. The New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group, which grew to about 22 foundations from across the political spectrum, started meeting monthly in summer 2018 to collect funds, set a strategy, and then fund the strategy to support an accurate census in traditionally undercounted communities. The New Mexico Association of Grantmakers oversaw implementation of the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group's strategy, which became NM Counts 2020. NM Counts 2020 was a cross-sector collaboration among the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group, New Mexico Civic Engagement Table/Center for Civic Policy (NMCET/CCP), Native American Voter Alliance Education Project (NAVAEP), and New Mexico Voices for Children, along with the US Census Bureau, the New Mexico state government, GPS, and other nonprofit, local government, and private sector stakeholders. The New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group engaged MediaDesk, a New Mexican communications firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, to offer general communications support to NM Counts 2020.

In April 2019, the governor issued an executive order for a Statewide Complete Count Commission, which eventually comprised legislators from each chamber and party, Cabinet secretaries of departments with population reach (e.g., Indian Affairs Department, Veteran Affairs Department), congressional delegation members, the secretary of state, philanthropic leaders from the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group, and

representatives of tribal and business communities (e.g., New Mexico Association of Commerce and Industry, Albuquerque Business First). The Statewide Complete Count Commission’s collective efforts became known as i Count NM. With a grant from the New Mexico Department of Finance, NMCET/CCP strategized, developed, and implemented field operations for i Count NM’s Get Out the Count Campaign for Hard-to-Count Communities. Some of the funds were used to pay Real Time Solutions, a New Mexican web software company, to set up the i Count NM website and develop a social media campaign.

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

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Thornburg Foundation and Albuquerque Community Foundation</b>	Co-chaired the New Mexico Census 2020 Funder Group comprising about 22 local foundations, which funded nonprofit organizations and facilitated the broad cross-sector collaboration, as NM Counts 2020
<b>University of New Mexico’s GPS Research Center</b>	Led 2017 LUCA; participated in NM Counts 2020 and the Statewide Complete Count Commission/i Count NM; provided data, mapping tools, and support for using data to inform targeted GOTC and communications
<b>New Mexico Counties</b>	Facilitated GOTC participation by all 33 counties and information sharing among counties as part of i Count NM
<b>New Mexico Association of Grantmakers</b>	Led and coordinated the New Mexico Census 2020 Funder Group
<b>New Mexico Civic Engagement Table/Center for Civic Policy</b>	Led the civic engagement strategy for NM Counts 2020 and, with the New Mexico Department of Finance & Administration, led field operations for i Count NM’s Get Out the Count Campaign for Hard-to-Count Communities
<b>Native American Voter Alliance Education Project</b>	Led the New Mexico Native Census Coalition, including the All Pueblo Council of Governors and Urban Indian Coalitions; participated in NM Counts 2020
<b>MediaDesk</b>	Led the planning, materials development, and mobilization/coordination of communications for NM Counts and i Count NM

<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

Overall, **\$13.1 million** of state government and philanthropic funding supported census efforts in New Mexico. In addition, some organizations and institutions made in-kind donations of staff time that supported these efforts.

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

<b>Funding Source and Amount</b>	<b>Funding Purpose</b>
<b>Philanthropy: \$1.31 million</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Thornburg Foundation and the Albuquerque Community Foundation contributed \$60,000 to support LUCA in the state.</li> <li>• The New Mexico 2020 Census Funder group raised \$1.25 million from local and national funders to support NM Counts 2020. Funds were disbursed through four grant rounds to about 70 nonprofit organizations of various sizes. They first focused on GOTC with immigrant populations; the second focused on coordination among nonprofit and tribal organizations; the third focused on rural, Hispanic, African American, and Asian American communities; and the fourth focused on “rapid response” to help with the final phase of GOTC and adapting tactics necessitating change because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Funds also supported MediaDesk for them to carry out communications work. The fund also made two additional grants totaling roughly \$325,000 to support outreach by NAVAEP and the New Mexico Dream Team in tribal and immigrant communities within the state.</li> <li>• The Census Equity Fund, a national funder group, contributed \$725,000 of the \$1.25 million that supported NM Counts 2020.</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

<p><b>State Government:</b> <b>\$11.8 million</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through advocacy by a few local funders and informational support from the state demographer, the legislature apportioned \$300,000 to LUCA.</li> <li>• Through advocacy by Voices for Children, broad messaging by the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group, testimony by GPS, and a high level of support from the office of the newly elected governor, the state included \$3.5 million in the 2019 budget for census outreach. The allocated government funds went primarily to 33 county governments, and the Indian Affairs Department to set up local complete count committees and support outreach in the state’s 23 sovereign pueblos and tribes. Allocation sizes were weighted by each area’s total population and total population in historically undercounted communities.</li> <li>• The state government appropriated an additional \$8 million for census outreach in 2020. The Statewide Complete Count Commission used these monies to double the funding granted to the Department of Indian Affairs and the 33 county governments; fund NMCET/CCP-led field GOTC operations in historically undercounted communities through two rounds of contracts with 15 community-based organizations; and invest in local communications support by MediaDesk.</li> </ul>
<p><b>In-Kind Contributions:</b> <b>Unknown</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time and effort on parts of philanthropy, state agencies, and municipal and county governments also contributed to both the NM 2020 and i Count NM campaigns</li> </ul>

# DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**Early on, NM Counts 2020 invested in communications, including message testing and message development, as a key piece of infrastructure for their census work.** MediaDesk, a New Mexican communications firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, spearheaded communication efforts for NM Counts 2020. In the first meeting with MediaDesk, the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group decided they wanted to invest in message testing. They hired Latino Decisions, a national public opinion firm with a principal who lived in Albuquerque, to spearhead that effort. The message-testing research showed the effectiveness of spending a very small amount of time educating people about the importance of the census, the importance of the messengers being “local voices,” such as a neighbor or school principal, and which messages were most effective for specific communities. MediaDesk used the results of the message-testing research to develop bite-sized messages that people on the ground could use verbatim and as a basis to reassure them that their hard work was making a difference.

**When the Statewide Complete Count Commission/i Count NM formed, they were able to leverage and expand the reach of the existing communications infrastructure.** By late 2019, the two parallel census efforts, the Statewide Complete Count Commission/i Count NM and the New Mexico 2020 Census Funder Group/NM Counts 2020, were regularly sharing information and coordinating their efforts. In 2020, the state apportioned an additional \$8 million to the census effort. Part of this funding was used to invest in additional local communications support by MediaDesk. This funding enabled MediaDesk to add a variety of general messaging materials to the i Count NM website and set up a communications hub where all nonprofit organizations, complete count committees, and state agencies could go for communications support and resources, including ads and materials that were custom made for the populations they were targeting, e.g., featuring a known community leader. If partners came to the hub with questions that MediaDesk could not answer, MediaDesk was able to leverage the i Count NM and NM Counts 2020 networks by finding the knowledgeable partner and then disseminating the information through the hub. The funding the state provided to MediaDesk and the complete count committees, as well as MediaDesk's roles supporting both statewide and local communications, enabled MediaDesk to leverage for local use what they developed for statewide audiences and to help local complete count committees' efforts be supplementary to the state's efforts rather than duplicative. MediaDesk also published a biweekly newsletter to support information sharing and coordination among all those engaging or interested in census efforts.

**NM Counts 2020 and i Count NM both spearheaded efforts to engage historically undercounted populations in the state, coordinating their efforts to maximize coverage and avoid overlap.** NM Counts 2020's strategy was to put resources into the hands of trusted messengers within traditionally undercounted communities, built upon tailored local messaging provided by MediaDesk. Overall, NM Counts 2020 provided grants to around 70 nonprofit organizations to promote the census in local communities, focusing on historically undercounted populations, including immigrant, Hispanic, tribal, African American, and Asian American communities. i Count NM's efforts supported outreach efforts of the 33 county governments, the Indian Affairs Department, local complete count committees, and the state's 23 sovereign pueblos and tribes, as well GOTC field operations, led by NMCET/CCP. Field operation efforts began in May 2020 and continued through September 2020. Each of the 15 community-based organizations funded by the state engaged with historically undercounted community members to educate them about the importance of the census, motivate them to complete the 2020 Census Survey, and facilitate its completion. Outreach techniques and technologies included phone banking, text messaging, social media ads, mailers, and literature drops. In partnership with the Department of Finance, NMCET/CCP supported the community-based organizations' efforts by providing overarching direction and guidance (e.g., campaign vision and strategy, campaign plans, and coordination), holding mandatory trainings on canvassing and phone banking, hosting weekly mandatory field operations meetings for information sharing and support, and sharing resources (i.e., templates for social media ads, mailers, literature drops, phone-banking scripts, and text messaging).

**Data and information sharing played a critical role in NM census efforts.** GPS created a number of data and mapping tools for the various partners so that they knew where state and philanthropic funding was going,

where the traditionally undercounted communities were located, and the unique demographic characteristics of those communities to inform properly targeted messaging. Regular feedback mechanisms helped spread learning across the groups involved. For example, GPS used the US Census Bureau's daily response rate data and frequently consulted with complete count committees on how to make sense of and act on these data. MediaDesk published a periodic newsletter, which included recommendations for adjusting on-the-ground strategies that helped groups adapt. New Mexico Counties also started hosting biweekly conference calls for complete count committee chairs to share effective strategies with each other. All of these mechanisms gave regular access to the most up-to-date content and information and leveraged learning throughout the various networks, in a landscape where messaging from the US Census Bureau was frequently changing and sometimes conflicting.

**The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant disruption to in-person census outreach work, forcing adaptation to alternative means of engagement.** Prior to COVID-19, census outreach plans included primarily in-person or relationship-based opportunities, such as door knocking and attending community events. Once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, these efforts mostly stopped and had to stop completely on tribal lands, which were locked down and restricted to tribe members only. Some partners switched to text banking and phone banking, which allowed callers to give census messaging directly to potential respondents. The text- and phone-banking tool they used allowed callers to log in from anywhere and click through a script based on particular responses; if the person said they were willing to take the census, the caller could transfer them directly to the Census Bureau to complete their form. Partners also hosted drive-up events, such as food giveaways, where they would also assist census completion on iPads. Some efforts combined food assistance or mutual aid with distribution of flyers and mailers about the census. Communications shifted from being more focused on out-of-home experiences, such as ads in movie theaters and on billboards, to focusing more on in-home experiences, such as online ads and streaming services. MediaDesk also developed a live electronic toolkit that could be updated and accessed at any time to help groups make adjustments.

**Working with the Census Bureau was challenging in many ways, leading to both strife and confusion at the state and local levels.** High turnover among US Census Bureau Partnership Specialists made it difficult to sustain a collaborative relationship, and gaps in staffing hampered outreach. This, plus changes in closing dates caused by polarization at the national level, put local census staff in uncomfortable positions and caused friction at the state level. Confusion was further sowed by a breakdown in Bureau communications, such as when they put ads in papers saying to look out for census forms in places where most people did not receive census forms through the mail.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **The diversity of the coalitions in New Mexico was critical to creating a broad base of support for the census.** It was important to have an inclusive, broad effort reflected both in the diversity of foundations in the New Mexico 2020 Census Funders Group and in the Statewide Complete Count Commission (e.g., government representatives from both sides of the aisle and business community representatives) and their public outreach (e.g., op eds about how the census supports economic development) helped send the message that the census is not political and “gave cover” to varied stakeholders to get involved. Nonprofit organizations also reported that the diversity of their coalitions at the local level helped with the success of their GOTC efforts.
- **Investment in coordination and on-the-ground outreach was crucial.** It was important to invest in *both* coordination/strategy and individual nonprofit organizations closest to the community members they are trying to reach.
- **It would have been better to receive more state funding earlier** (and to know how much was going to go toward the census from beginning); it would have helped to build collaborative and communications infrastructure earlier, enabling the actors to be more efficient and do more with the same.
- **Investing heavily in coordinated communications support** that counties, tribes, and nonprofits could access as needed for customizable templates and custom materials greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the GOTC efforts statewide.
- **Local radio stations may offer an additional mechanism to engage communities during the next census.** Small local radio stations are an important communications resource, particularly in rural communities. In 2020, the federal government offered a grant program to support local radio stations to conduct census messaging. Although a number of small local NM radio stations applied for the federal grants, none ultimately received them, suggesting that there may be systemic issues disadvantaging small local radio stations from accessing these funds. Leveraging the reach of local radio stations could offer an additional mechanism for engagement for future efforts to promote the census.
- **Strong and active support from the governor was critical to getting efforts off the ground in the state and to sustaining momentum.** Early on, the support of the governor helped build momentum for census efforts in the state, leading, in part, to the state government’s funding appropriations. The governor not only leveraged her own role to support the work, but she also directed key members of her staff and government officials to contribute to efforts in various ways.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Although some of the New Mexico 2020 Census Funders Group members, Statewide Complete Count Commission members, and nonprofit organizations involved in the 2020 Census had existing relationships, working together in this highly coordinated and collaborative way was new for them. The trust built between the foundations and nonprofits within NM Counts 2020 is leading to continued collaboration to ensure the accuracy of the state's census data and address the state's broadband shortage, which is especially timely for supporting the COVID-19 pandemic-related spike in telehealth and online learning. The University of New Mexico's GPS is hoping to collaborate with demographers in other states with high rates of Update Leave ("frontier states") to improve address lists before the next census, which is also important for public safety (e.g., responding to 911 calls).

## DATA SOURCES

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

- Thornburg Foundation
- New Mexico Association of Grantmakers
- MediaDesk
- University of New Mexico; New Mexico State Representative for the Federal State Cooperative for Population Estimates (New Mexico's state demographer)
- New Mexico Civic Engagement Table/Center for Civic Policy