

# NEW YORK

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 York 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

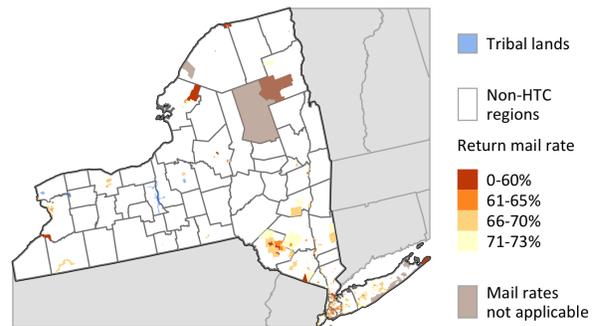
**19,618,453**

TOTAL POPULATION

**7,239,042**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



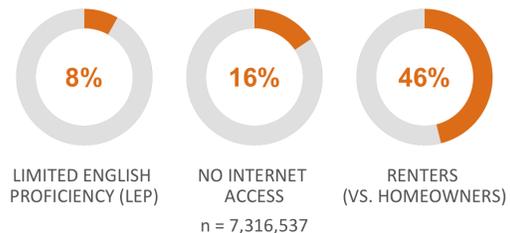
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

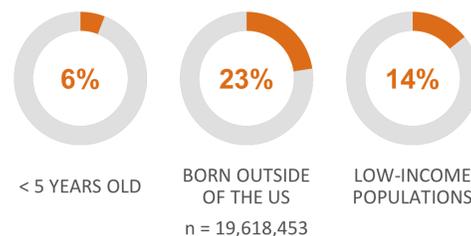
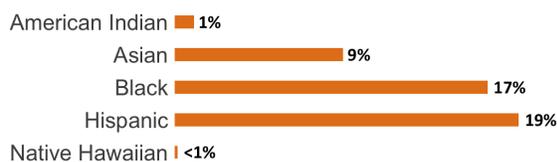
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

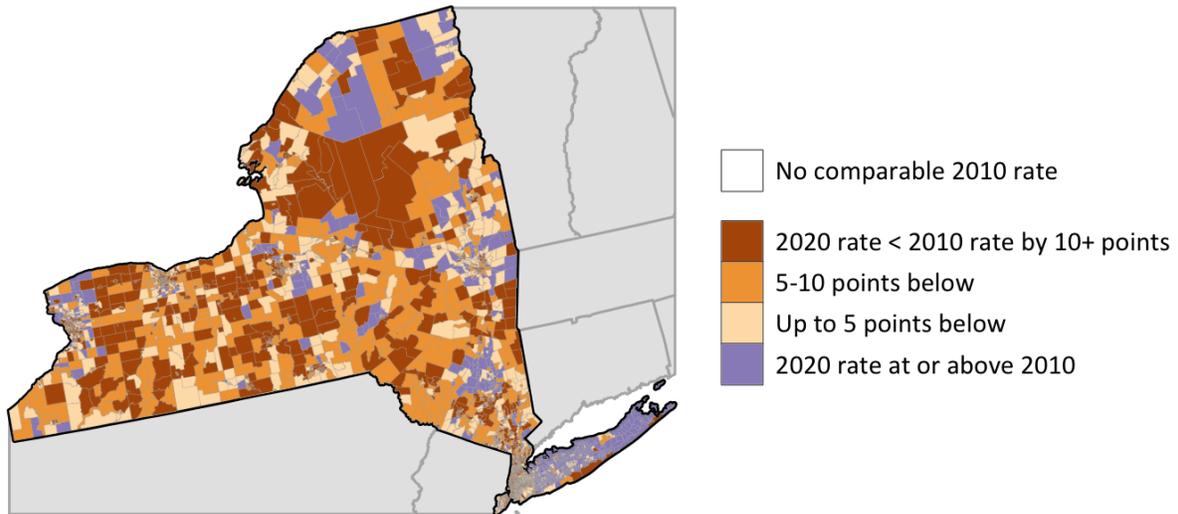




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	<b>-0.4</b>
2010	64.6%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010





## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

New York's 2020 Census efforts were grounded in statewide collaborative efforts among philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, as well as cross-sector collaborations at local levels, which were well connected through overlapping key actors and ongoing coordination.

Efforts first began through a small group of foundations which leveraged relationships from their 2010 Census experience to form a statewide pooled fund. Knowing the Hagedorn Foundation was soon to spend down its endowment, in late 2016 the Long Island Community Foundation approached its partner in the 2010 Census efforts to see if it would connect the Community Foundation with the Funders Census Initiative (FCI). The Hagedorn Foundation agreed, and the Long Island Community Foundation was given a position on the FCI 2020 Leadership Team. In those FCI Leadership Team conversations, the Long Island Community Foundation learned that the 2010 undercount in upstate New York had resulted in lost congressional seats and that many states across the country were in the process of building statewide infrastructure to support 2020 Census outreach. Spurred by this information, in summer 2017, the Long Island Community Foundation approached The New York Community Trust and the New York Foundation—which had engaged in different downstate 2010 Census efforts—to consider building an infrastructure that would support statewide success in the 2020 count. Those three foundations began to meet with funders from all over the state—often through regional philanthropy support organization meetings—to invite their participation in a statewide pooled fund, emphasizing the economic implications of an undercount. The funders also connected with Engage New York, a philanthropic support network for leaders of social justice-oriented community foundations and other place-based foundations in the state, which had begun forming at around the same time. In summer 2018, the foundations created the New York State Census Equity Fund, to be housed at The New York Community Trust. The New York State Census Equity Fund was led by a steering committee comprising a core group of 12 foundations plus Engage New York, which met at least monthly through the course of their work together. In addition to giving grants from their pooled fund (see Table 2), the New York State Census Equity Fund helped inform the development of regional and local complete count committees based on the knowledge represented in the funders group. The regional Census Bureau and The Graduate Center, CUNY were very helpful in these early phases, the latter in particular with making the case to the counties to support the census efforts.

Also in 2016, the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) began both internal discussions about playing a statewide role in the 2020 Census—which would build from the three regional offices they had recently established in central New York, Long Island, and western New York—and discussions with early-involved funders. Plans sped up in the spring of 2018, when the Trump administration announced its intention to include a citizenship question on the census. With a “signal investment” from the national census funder collaborative, in the summer of 2018 NYIC kicked off NY Counts 2020 with a large conference, also funded by the New York State Census Equity Fund. NY Counts 2020 was a broad-based, statewide coalition focused on

maximal census participation, particularly among historically marginalized and undercounted communities in the state. The coalition consisted of close to 200 racial, ethnic, immigrant, LGBTQ+, religious, health, education, labor, housing, social services, and business groups that worked in partnership with regional complete count committees and state and local government officials. Regional networks were dialed in to NY Counts to different degrees, with Long Island (headed by the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island), Western New York (headed by Partnership for the Public Good), and Hudson Valley (headed by New York Civic Engagement Table [NYCET]/State Voices) particularly active. The coalition struggled to form networks in the Southern Tier and North Country regions, which are very large, mostly rural areas. NY Counts provided a robust mechanism for information- and resource-sharing through its maintenance of an active resource hub and learning community with its partners.

The city of New York invested substantially in 2020 Census efforts, with significant support and from the Association for a Better New York (ABNY), NYIC/NY Counts 2020, Hester Street, and The United Way of New York City. Also, at around the same time as the funders group and NY Counts were formalizing in 2018, ABNY—a nonprofit coalition of business, labor, nonprofit, and political leaders—identified the census as their next big priority. ABNY hired a full-time executive vice president, first to encourage and support the city government to staff and implement the census outreach plan designed by its chief demographer, then to support census efforts by government entities at all levels, community-based organizations in the five boroughs of New York City, Census Bureau staff, and any other stakeholders who wanted to participate. NYC Census 2020—a collaboration among the Mayor’s Office and City Council, CUNY, community-based organizations, the city’s three library systems, labor unions, and civic and private institutions across all five boroughs—disbursed funds to community organizing groups, direct service providers, faith-based organizations, and advocacy organizations as grants. Borough-wide complete count committees, led by borough presidents, were also quite active in Get Out the Count (GOTC) efforts. An Interfaith Census 2020 Count Coalition, led by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Catholic Charities of New York, Council of Peoples Organization, and the Interfaith Center of New York, brought together over 207 faith leaders representing Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist communities to focus activities in 20 communities in all five boroughs that were historically undercounted.

The various collaborative efforts throughout New York state benefited from crossover and regular communication in their leadership bodies. The New York Foundation represented the New York State Census Equity Fund on the NY Counts 2020 steering committee meetings. At these regular meetings the Foundation shared funder activities and learned about NY Counts’ and their partners’ activities across the state, which the Foundation would share with relevant regional partners so they knew about new opportunities for regional collaboration and coordination. Likewise, NYIC and New York State Census Equity Fund had representation on the ABNY Census 2020 Organizing and Action Committee, and ABNY was one of a small number of NYC Census 2020 Citywide Partners tasked with helping to design and implement the city’s census plan. Further, from the inception of the collaborative networks, representatives of the New York State Census Equity Fund, NY Counts/NYIC, and ABNY met regularly to share their plans and activities to ensure maximum

leveraging of resources and minimal duplication of efforts. ABNY was also in frequent contact with the governor's office to inform them about what different parties were doing and advise them on how best to support local efforts.

The state government allocated funds to the 2020 Census, but several inhibiting factors, compounded by lack of communication and transparency, resulted in significant challenges to the disbursement of those funds and to local GOTC efforts. The state did not support its own coordinated statewide effort, but rather offered grants to local governments and nonprofits and "held conferences across the state to inform counties and community-based organizations on best practices to coordinate efforts and resources to reach at-risk and hard-to-count communities." [1] After declining offers by philanthropies to use their extant infrastructure to disburse state funds and after significant and poorly understood delays, the state formally announced grant opportunities in January 2019, with the plan to disburse funds through August 2020. This plan was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and communication with organizations and localities expecting to receive state funds was variable at best. Stakeholders are unsure of how much of the monies allocated to grantmaking reached local governments and nonprofits (see Table 2).

Prior to and throughout the census, NY Counts 2022/NYIC, ABNY, and many of the involved funders engaged in efforts to encourage the state to fund and support the census. NYIC and ABNY engaged in early advocacy related to fighting the inclusion of the citizenship question, then—with the NY Counts coalition—encouraged the state and New York City governments to adequately fund census efforts and pressure the state to disburse the state funds that had been allocated. Funders signed onto an open letter to the governor encouraging adequate funding for census outreach and met with government officials at state and New York City levels. ABNY wrote op-ed pieces and activated its network to make direct asks of the governor.

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

Actor	Role
<b>The New York Community Trust</b>	Housed the New York State Census Equity Fund
<b>Brooklyn Community Foundation, Central New York Community Foundation, Charles H. Revson Foundation, Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Dyson Foundation, Long Island Community Foundation, The New York Community Trust, New York Foundation, Westchester Community Foundation, Engage New York</b>	As the steering committee for the New York State Census Equity Fund (along with The New York Community Trust), the nine foundations and one funder coalition from across the state raised funds and gave grants to about 60 organizations and networks to boost census participation by historically undercounted communities; part of NY Counts 2020
<b>New York Immigration Coalition</b>	Led NY Counts 2020, the statewide network of cross-sector groups and information- and resource-sharing hub; active advocate for state government funding allocation, funding disbursement, and support for statewide census efforts
<b>Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, New York Civic Engagement Table, Partnership for the Public Good</b>	Led and supported regional nonprofit networks in Long Island (Health and Welfare Council of Long Island and NYCET), Western New York (Partnership for the Public Good, NYCET), Hudson Valley (NYCET), and New York City (NYCET) through existing networks and as a partner to NY Counts 2020
<b>The City of New York</b>	Convened a robust citywide effort called NYC Census 2020, with joint funding from the Mayor’s Office and the City Council

<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

<p><b>Association for a Better New York (ABNY)</b></p>	<p>Supported governmental and nonprofit organization GOTC efforts, primarily in New York City, focusing on coordination, research, public awareness, accessibility, and advocacy; activated coalition of cross-sector leaders to support GOTC</p>
<p><b>The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NALEO Education Fund, National Urban League, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, National LGBTQ Task Force</b></p>	<p>Supported statewide efforts through national networks and resources</p>

## FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Over \$3.4 million dollars of philanthropic funding and \$40 million in New York City government funding supported census efforts in New York. In addition, some organizations and institutions made in-kind donations of staff time that supported efforts. Although the state government allocated \$60 million to census efforts, stakeholders question how much was ultimately expended and disbursed to counties.

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

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<p><b>Philanthropy:</b> <b>\$3.4 million</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About 40 foundations and individual donors contributed to the New York State Census Equity Fund (a pooled fund), totalling \$3.4 million. Contributions started at \$5,000.</li> <li>• Of the total, the national Census Equity Fund contributed \$610,000 to the state pooled fund.</li> <li>• The New York Stat Census Equity Fund gave grants to about 60 organizations throughout the state to support census outreach in all historically undercounted communities, including those with large numbers of undocumented immigrants to university students.</li> <li>• Grants were given based on regional committee recommendations and, in less networked areas (e.g., the Southern Tier region), through the community foundation network.</li> <li>• Members of the steering committee were also given funds to invest in the census regionally, based on each region’s population.</li> <li>• Many foundations that had contributed to the pooled fund supplemented those funds with additional grants to local organizations and governments.</li> <li>• Some additional philanthropies contributed to census efforts as well. For example, Robin Hood Foundation gave \$500,000 in grants to community-based organizations in New York City focused on “historically undercounted and under-resourced communities” as part of their 2020 Census initiative.</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: Reported \$60 million commitment; unknown amount disbursed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state government was going to commit \$60 million to census efforts: \$40 million in restructured existing funding and \$20 million in new funds that was to go to county governments.</li> <li>• After considerable delay, allocations were derailed by the pandemic; not all counties were able to access the money they had been told they would receive, and many that did receive it had challenges distributing the money further as planned.</li> <li>• Stakeholders do not know how much of the state funds actually reached counties.</li> </ul>
<p><b>City Government (New York City): \$40 million</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$26 million from the Mayor’s Office and \$14 million from the City Council constituted the Complete Count Fund.</li> <li>• The Complete Count Fund program awarded grants to around 150 community-based organizations, or “trusted voices,” to ensure that support for outreach was proportional to the needs of historically undercounted communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>In-Kind Contributions: Unknown</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitals and health centers invested staff time in talking with people about the census.</li> <li>• Public utilities included materials about the census in their bills, and public transportation donated ad space on buses.</li> <li>• Businesses donated staff time and resources, including the Real Estate Board of New York, which made an educational video for their members, and sports teams like the Mets and Islanders, which made public service announcements about the census.</li> <li>• Suffolk County invested a lot of time and resources in census outreach.</li> </ul>

# DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**NY Counts 2020 and the New York State Census Equity Fund leveraged their networks to support GOTC statewide, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the delay in state funding.** NY Counts 2020 planned to conduct GOTC in three outreach phases: Community Education and Public Awareness Outreach (pre-rollout), Mobilization for Self-Response (self-response period), and Targeted Follow-Up (non-response follow-up). Mobilization for Self-Response was to focus on hosting and directing people to Digital Access Points in commonly frequented locations, which would host and staff a kiosk for census completion, informational hotlines, and community events, as well as canvassing, phone-banking, peer-to-peer texting, and other digital efforts. NY Counts encouraged their partners to identify historically undercounted communities to target with their efforts by inviting them to think about who their existing programs and activities reach, who is likely to be responsive to organizing efforts, and who in their community would not be reached by others' efforts. NY Counts continuously updated their website/hub information, communications resources, and training opportunities to support these efforts, inviting partners to contribute as well. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York in mid-March, households were first receiving invitations to complete the census and localities were expecting to receive state funds that, for many, never arrived. NY Counts encouraged its community-based organizations to continue finding ways to engage, primarily through social media, text-banking, phone-banking, hosting virtual and socially distant events (e.g., neighborhood caravans), traditional media engagement, distributing printed material where people still go, and distributing printed material along with provision of essential services (on their own or through new partnerships). Both the New York State Census Equity Fund and NY Counts encouraged partners to use data to inform outreach efforts. At New York State Census Equity Fund meetings, they reviewed CUNY maps showing locations of communities that were undercounted in the 2010 Census, and regional funders shared the information with local stakeholders to inform their outreach plans. Once the count started, they used maps showing real-time response rates to inform decisions about where to direct local efforts. NY Counts referred partners to the Census Bureau's online Hard to Count 2020 maps.

**Many local GOTC efforts flourished due to support from and coordination among NY Counts 2020 and the New York State Census Equity Fund.** Spurred by and supported through its engagement in the New York State Census Equity Fund, the Central New York Community Foundation also invested additional funds and staff time in a robust GOTC effort in Syracuse. GOTC efforts included Facebook town halls, social media circles, partnering with libraries to include census information in curbside book pickups, and focus groups in some of the smaller community centers that were still having face-to-face, socially distant activities. GOTC messages were spread through public service announcements by the mayor, Spanish-speaking radio channels, billboards, and by partnering with school districts and the public broadcasting system to produce public service announcements in multiple languages and with diverse speakers. Since there were no jobs out in the

community due to the pandemic, the city of Syracuse repurposed its summer youth employment program to instead give youth stipends to be GOTC influencers on social media and with their own families.

**In New York City, outreach strategies were similarly dominated by different in-person events based on the communities that organizations were trying to reach, requiring a hard pivot due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Some community-based organizations had partnered with nail salons and barbershops to offer free services as an incentive for census completion. Libraries in all five boroughs had planned to hold events in the community with their partners, in addition to planned in-library programming and supports for census completion, for which staff were being trained. After COVID-19 hit, more emphasis was placed on virtual outreach, and ABNY-hosted webinars and online meetings to support effective social media outreach to various constituencies. During the civil unrest following the killing of George Floyd, many performing outreach brought census materials to protests and used messages that tied census outreach to social justice. The city shifted how they spent money for the media campaign, from bus and subway ads to targeted digital ads (e.g., on music streaming platforms). Some particularly creative New York City outreach efforts included an ABNY-hosted Census Flash Mob in Times Square to raise awareness about the end of the self-response period, where dancers from a broad range of communities performed in “Get Counted NYC!” T-shirts. In another effort, rabbis throughout the city included GOTC messages in their discussion of a Torah portion about the importance of being counted, which fortuitously arrived in the Jewish calendar-determined queue within the self-response period.

**GOTC efforts were also supported through investments in research, local communications, and civic engagement capacity.** In response to an early request from the New York City government, ABNY researched obstacles to census response within specific communities, the best messages for addressing those obstacles, and the best modes for communicating those messages. Data collected through community-specific focus groups and a poll by Quinnipiac University were combined with 2010 Census response data to inform targeted efforts with community-specific messaging. For community-based organizations spearheading outreach efforts, ABNY also created a pro bono pop-up public relations agency that produced a range of communications materials, including collateral and digital assets. A New York State Census Equity Fund grant went to the Center for Community Media at CUNY’s Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism for a fellowship program for community and ethnic media reporters, editors, and publishers from New York’s metro region to enhance their ability to report on census-related stories and build civic connections in their communities.

**Challenges related to roles of state government and federal government and engaging specific sectors, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, included:**

- Red tape and politics at the state level, compounded by the pandemic, prevented state funding from reaching counties, and genuine alliances between collaboration leaders and state government point people became irrelevant.

- Regions more reliant on state funding were uncomfortable being associated with advocacy efforts that were critical of state government.
- Fearmongering and harmful rhetoric about citizenship, primarily from the federal government, was confusing for immigrant populations and made it much harder to gain their trust with regard to the census.
- Being an early epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted many historically undercounted communities, was a particular challenge for GOTC efforts in New York City.
- Efforts did not do enough to engage tribal communities; the New York State Census Equity Fund made one grant to the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University that had ties to tribal communities on Long Island, but the New York State Census Equity Fund did not make connections to other parts of the state with significant numbers of Native Americans.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Although there was much to appreciate about the collaboration and coordination among those providing funding for GOTC and nonprofit organizations, improvements in alignment and collaboration would benefit future large-scale civic engagement efforts.** Even with the crossover and regular communication among key actors in the New York State Census Equity Fund and NY Counts 2020, some stakeholders wondered whether the statewide effort would have been better served by a joint coalition rather than two largely parallel efforts. Relatedly, an aligned funding process among the New York State Census Equity Fund, foundations that are not part of the funder group, and government entities would have reduced the burden on investees, reserving more of their bandwidth for GOTC itself. That said, for large-scale efforts like statewide GOTC, nothing can substitute for a powerful state-driven response comprising strong and well-supported plans at the county and city levels.
- **Importance of community foundations and their “symbiotic” relationship with the statewide efforts.** Community foundations played many key roles in the state’s 2020 Census efforts, as contributors to the pooled fund, members of local complete count committees, and active participants in collaborative efforts at the state, regional, and local levels. They brought funds, resources, and best practices from other parts of the state to regional and local entities, many of which would not have been engaged in census work otherwise. They boosted local and regional census efforts through direct work with local stakeholders, raising awareness and facilitating cross-sector collaboration. Many also provided additional funding to local entities as needs arose. Beyond contributing to improved local GOTC in these ways, the connections that community foundations facilitated between local and state entities strengthened the organizing capacity of many local organizations, which will be leveraged in future community-building efforts at the local, regional, and state levels.
- **Nonprofit ecosystems vary widely across the state, and it would be helpful to think more broadly and creatively about potential investees in areas of the state where there is less knowledge of the nonprofit ecosystem.** There was a missed opportunity to find and work with allies across the state beyond nonprofit organizations, such as libraries (or library membership associations) and local media entities (e.g., Nepalese radio or ethnic newspapers, which are not typical partners of foundations).
- **Statewide efforts would benefit from earlier engagement of regional and local stakeholders to incorporate more participatory processes.** The New York State Census Equity Fund may have been better served by a more participatory grantmaking model in which regional recommendations for grantmaking by the Equity Fund were informed by nonprofits in addition to regional funders. Local efforts might be better served by more clarity about connections among efforts at the national, state, and local levels. Some of the local regions did not understand that what they were getting from NY Counts 2020 was part of a national effort. Earlier engagement of the New York State County Executives Association could help with this.

- **There is great value in understanding the census as foundational to democracy—within a cycle along with redistricting and elections—and incorporating nonpolitical messages about its importance early and often.** Future civic engagement efforts will likely benefit from increased understanding of relationships among democracy, census, redistricting, and elections among all key actors in the 2020 Census. Further, if raising awareness about the importance of the census starts earlier, people are more likely to understand that importance ahead of any efforts to politicize it. Ideally, helping people understand the importance of being counted is consistently part of community conversations, as well as part of curricula in schools and immigration processes. During GOTC, nonpolitical messages (e.g., “if you care about the arts, you care about the census”) can be most effective.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Many of the downstate funders had worked together during the 2010 Census, though more loosely and focused solely on their own regions. Although ABNY was well connected with cross-sector leaders prior to their census work, this was their first time engaging in a more community-based effort (versus boosterism). In New York state, most prior collaboration had occurred within sectors or across a couple sectors—this breadth and depth of cross-sector collaboration was unprecedented. NYC, however, had started building out their statewide infrastructure prior to the 2020 Census, and their leadership in the 2020 Census work helped them expand and build relationships statewide, which also benefited local civic engagement organizations.

At the time of this writing, NYC is bringing together a coalition to support redistricting efforts with some of the 2020 Census actors, and the funders table is sharing information about redistricting efforts so that funders statewide are aware of opportunities to be a part of those efforts and act locally. Some of the involved foundations are also working together on programs related to urban poverty and racial equity. ABNY is thinking about using their newly enriched network for vaccine adoption and voter engagement.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- The New York Community Trust
- Long Island Community Foundation
- Central New York Community Foundation
- Association for a Better New York
- New York Immigration Coalition

### Notes

[1] <https://www.ny.gov/programs/2020-census>