

# RHODE ISLAND

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 Rhode Island based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=2).

<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

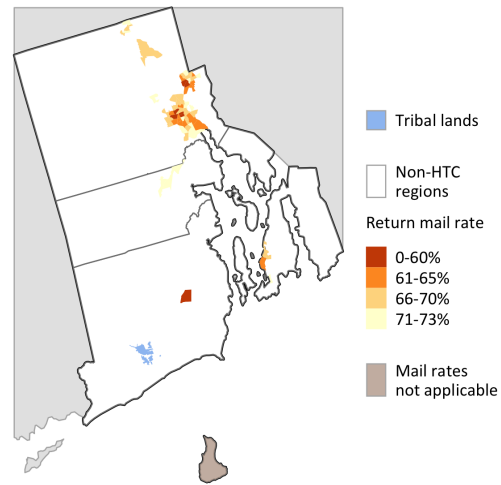
**1,056,611**

TOTAL POPULATION

**256,792**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



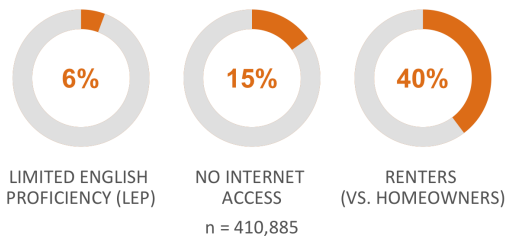
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

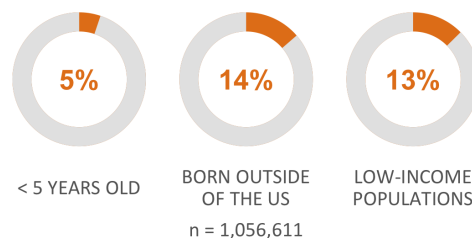
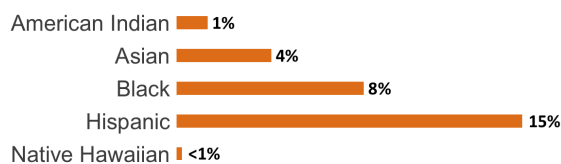
### HOUSEHOLDS

Percent of total number of households in the state that have the following characteristics:



### INDIVIDUALS

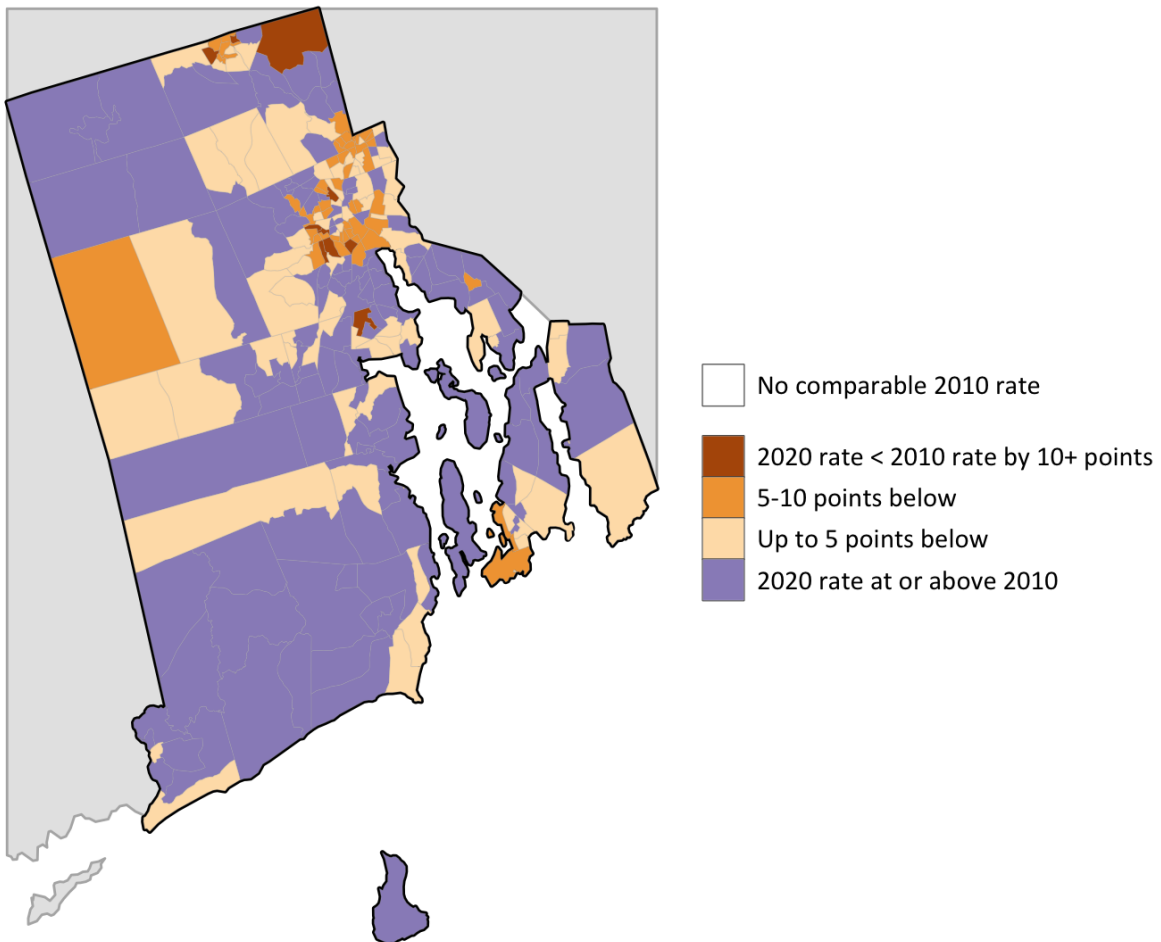
Percent of total number of individuals in the state that have characteristics of historically undercounted populations:



# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>-0.2</b>
2010	65.7%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



# STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Formed in late 2018 by order of the governor, the State Complete Count Committee oversaw efforts to ensure a fair and accurate census count in Rhode Island. At its peak, the State Complete Count Committee had 61 members, including representatives from multiple sectors across the state, including state and local government, nonprofits, unions, health and education organizations, and corporate groups. The State Complete Count Committee co-chairs were the director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (who was replaced by the Secretary of Human Services after the pandemic struck) and the mayor of Central Falls, Rhode Island. The State Complete Count Committee formed smaller subcommittees that focused on outreach to specific constituencies across the state.

Census efforts in Rhode Island benefited from the fact that Providence County was selected by the Census Bureau as the location for its End-to-End Test in 2018. The End-to-End Test was an opportunity for the Census Bureau to test the procedures and processes that would be used for the 2020 Census. Due to involvement in the End-To-End Test, many residents living in Providence County, representing about half of the state, had the opportunity to learn about the census and engage with its processes prior to the official start of the count. This gave the State Complete Count Committee a bit of a leg up when they began their efforts to ensure a complete and accurate count within the state.

Census efforts within the state included broad-based media and communications campaigns as well as tailored outreach to historically undercounted populations via partnership with local nonprofit groups. Funding came from the state government and state philanthropic groups.

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

Actor	Role
<b>State Complete Count Committee</b>	The State Complete Count Committee led and coordinated the state’s census campaign in collaboration with a diverse set of stakeholders across the state.
<b>Rhode Island Foundation, United Way of Rhode Island, and other philanthropic funders</b>	In partnership with other funders, the Rhode Island Foundation created a pooled fund to support the efforts of the State Complete Count Committee.

<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, \$1 million from state government and philanthropic sources supported census efforts in Rhode Island.

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

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<b>Philanthropy:</b> <b>\$535,000</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rhode Island Foundation and United Way of Rhode Island created a pooled fund to support census efforts in the state, raising a total of \$535,000 from funders across the state.</li> <li>• Funds supported the activities of the State Complete Count Committee. Most of the funds went to grants to nonprofits, and other entities, to conduct outreach to historically undercounted populations.</li> </ul>
<b>State Government:</b> <b>\$500,000</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state government allocated a total of \$500,000.</li> <li>• Funding from both the government and philanthropy went to support the work of the State Complete Count Committee, including a communications campaign (\$375,000), a nonpartisan education campaign (\$335,000), grants to groups to conduct outreach to historically undercounted populations (\$325,000), software to support the State Complete Count Committee’s work (\$100,000), and census events to encourage participation (\$25,000).</li> </ul>
<b>In-Kind Contributions:</b> <b>Unknown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some entities provided in-kind services, including printing by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, media services by United Way of Rhode Island, and New Harbor Group.</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

**Rhode Island created targeted campaigns to specific historically undercounted populations, combining targeted communication and grants to local groups to conduct outreach on the ground.** The State Complete Count Committee had subcommittees focused on organizing efforts related to different populations. Some of the target populations included Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African American, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and the Portuguese community.

**The original plan for on-the-ground outreach was to revolve around door-knocking.** When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the State Complete Count Committee had to pivot their efforts to digital advocacy and other alternative means of engagement, including:

- Distribution of census literature at food pickups and delivery: For example, groups coordinated with the Providence Public School District, where students could pick up a free lunch along with census materials to share with their families.
- A paid phone-banking and texting campaign to replace in-person engagements
- Senior check-ins to engage older Rhode Islanders to fill out the census
- Social media engagement: For example, in Woonsocket, a grantee organization held online concerts on Facebook with artists spotlighting the importance of filling out the census.
- Traditional media campaigns, including leveraging representative language programming to engage with individuals whose first language was not English

**Hiring specialized expertise helped enhance the State Complete Count Committee's efforts, although coordination between experts could have been better.** The Rhode Island Foundation hired a consultant to write the initial plan that created the structure and defined the work for the State Complete Count Committee. Common Cause hired a staffer to coordinate efforts and ensure that the census team was executing on their goals and plans. In addition, a communications team helped to oversee communications. The state hired two campaign staffers who ran on-the-ground outreach. Consultants did not always coordinate, which sometimes led to confusion for groups on the ground, who had to deal with multiple communications from consultants involved.

**In contrast to many states, Rhode Island does not have a significant rural population. Therefore, census efforts were most concentrated around major population centers.** The urban core of Rhode Island—Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls—constituted a central focus for census engagement, although there were also efforts in Woonsocket and Newport.

**The involvement of the state in the Census Bureau's End-to-End Test, predating the census window, benefited the state.** Actors involved were able to understand the distribution of historically undercounted populations early to support good planning. In addition, residents involved in the test had the opportunity to

become familiar with the census prior to the start of the official count. Nonprofit organizations were able to see what a census without any outreach (because there was no Census Bureau budget for outreach) would look like and were able to test outreach messages and methods.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Having broad-based participation from groups across the state enhanced efforts.** The collaborative effort was able to get a significant number of nonprofit organizations together to develop culturally relevant and responsive information to communities in Rhode Island. The State Complete Count Committee was effective in organizing the coalition of groups involved.
- **Documenting toolkits and lessons from the 2020 Census could make it easier for the next census.** This time around, the State Complete Count Committee and groups on the ground were starting from scratch.
- **Building capacity among nonprofits prior to the census could also enhance future efforts.** For some groups, the learning curve was steep, and having an earlier start could have made implementation smoother. It is crucial to start early as many challenges arose that were difficult to respond to in the moment.

## LOOKING FORWARD

The formal infrastructure that was built for the 2020 Census will not endure as it was a one-time only structure created as a result of the governor's executive order. However, the cross-sector relationships will endure as many nonprofits, government entities, and philanthropies will bring a vast array of knowledge on organizing and outreach to future efforts, including those related to the next census.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Grantmakers Council of Rhode Island
- Common Cause Rhode Island