

# 2020 CENSUS

## STATE-BY-STATE REPORTS

# VIRGINIA

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

<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

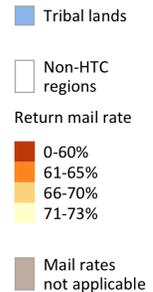
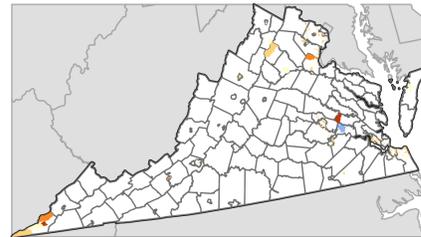
**8,413,774**

TOTAL POPULATION

**984,065**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



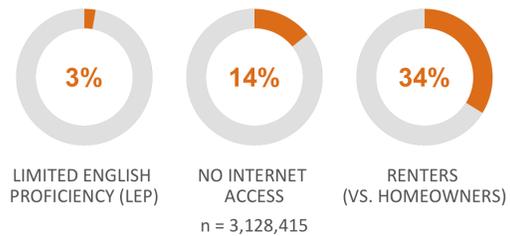
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

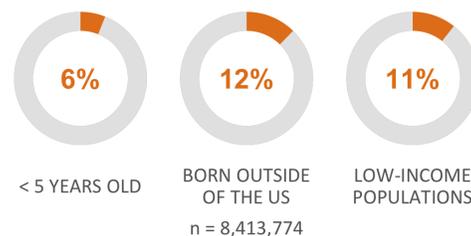
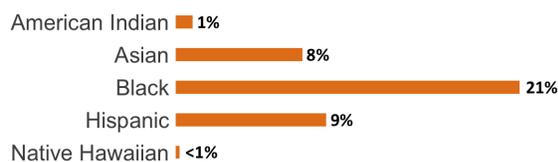
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

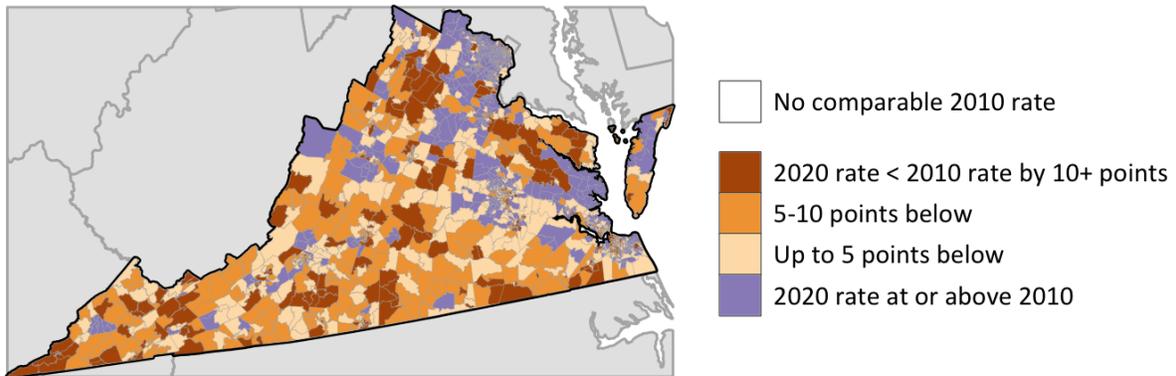




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>71.5%</b>	<b>+2.5</b>
2010	69.0%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010





## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Virginia's 2020 Census efforts were grounded in one statewide collaboration among nonprofit organizations, as well as a few funder-driven collaborative efforts focused on outreach in the Washington, D.C., region (which includes Northern Virginia). Local complete count committees had varying levels of stakeholder diversity and coordination. Milestones in the development of efforts in the state, as well as a description of key structures and actors, follow.

Motivated by fair representation, nonprofit organizations formed a statewide coalition focused on historically undercounted communities. After an early planning period in 2017 with some pro-democracy table partners, in 2018, the Virginia Civic Engagement Table (VCET) created the Virginia Counts Coalition, a statewide collaborative effort aimed at ensuring that "Virginians are represented fairly in the redistricting process and communities who have historically been underrepresented have a seat at the table."<sup>[1]</sup> The coalition composed about 20 Table partners, including New Virginia Majority, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Virginia, National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC), Progress Virginia, and Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA), plus Virginia Children's Voices. The coalition's early efforts focused on developing a set of priorities and recommendations to ensure an accurate count, securing funding for Census 2020 outreach across the state, and education. Later, the coalition supported the formation of a complete count committee in almost every county and focused on organizing. Weekly field program calls supported coordination in the field and ensured that scripts were aligned and that organizers knew when and where each other's activities were happening. Monthly calls enabled updates from the US Census Bureau and the state and local complete count committees.

Washington, D.C., region funders aligned funds for Get Out the Count (GOTC) and established a pooled fund. Also in 2018, the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers began convening the 2020 Census Working Group, a group of funders and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, aimed at strategically supporting a fair and accurate census count in the Washington, D.C., region. The group met regularly to coordinate activities, share information, and get updates from national and regional US Census Bureau officials. Many of the funders developed grantmaking strategies to facilitate outreach to historically undercounted communities (particularly communities of color, immigrants, and low-income communities) and support the work of complete count committees. In June 2019, many of the funders and nonprofit partners organized and hosted a regional cross-sector meeting to kick off GOTC in the greater Washington region, attended by over 250 individuals from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. A number of the funders also created a pooled fund called the Count DMV In Census Project, which was housed at the Greater Washington Community Foundation. In fall 2019, Count DMV In provided grants to nonprofit organizations—local "trusted messengers"—in the Washington, D.C., region to support public education, outreach and mobilization, communications, partnerships, and other critical activities focused on traditionally undercounted communities. (In Northern Virginia, nonprofit organizations in Arlington, Fairfax, Prince

William, and Loudoun counties and the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax, Manassas, and Manassas Park received grants.) Members of the 2020 Census Working Group also helped activate the census among regional leaders with wide reach into traditionally undercounted communities by cultivating strategic cross-sector partnerships.

In recognition of the inequitable undercount that results from siloed, local government-driven census outreach efforts, in late 2019, the Community Foundation for Northern Virginia launched the Count the Region initiative. The initiative brought together key cross-sector leaders to drive targeted support to and strategic coordination with the region's five largest jurisdictions (Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties) with the goals of increasing self-response rates among the region's general and traditionally undercounted populations. Count the Region focused on three core tasks: (1) sharing information, (2) developing consistent messaging, and (3) forging new partnerships. To facilitate information-sharing across the region, the initiative established the Northern Virginia Complete Count Committee (NVCCC) and a smaller subcommittee of local government staff. The NVCCC, composed of about 40 community leaders across government, business, faith, and education, "worked together to develop structures that facilitated ongoing communication and information exchange; to create and deliver unified, hyper-local messages about the value of this work; and to secure resources for communities that needed extra support to reach the hard-to-count households."<sup>[2]</sup> The smaller subcommittee of staff from each of the five local jurisdictions met every four to six weeks to share data, news, and strategies, which they brought back to existing local complete count committees. Both the NVCCC and the subcommittee had regular opportunities to hear directly from Census Bureau leadership, who gave status updates on overall and traditionally undercounted populations, provided strategic support, and answered questions. Due to its regional nature, new partners and funders were attracted to the Count the Region collaborative, and the collaborative helped link them with the most appropriate jurisdictional partner (e.g., Potomac Health Foundation was linked with Prince William County government staff), enabling the formation of a local complete count committee.

The state government effort appears to have been loosely coordinated. In December 2019, the governor signed an executive order establishing the statewide Virginia Complete Count Commission. The Commission was composed of leaders representing local jurisdictions; education; business; health care; social justice advocacy; child and family advocacy; and Black, Asian American, Latino, Native American, faith-based, and other traditionally undercounted communities (e.g., aging, rural, immigrants). The Virginia Complete Count Commission met nearly monthly in person then increasingly by conference call from January 2019 through at least August 2019.<sup>[3]</sup> Subcommittees focused on outreach through particular sectors and work groups focused on outreach to particular communities, met separately, and provided updates at full Commission meetings. The Virginia Complete Count Commission participated in meetings of the Virginia Counts Coalition, although they shared only limited information about the Commission's efforts. The New Virginia Majority lobbied the state government for funds devoted to the census in the state budget.

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

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Virginia Civic Engagement Table (VCET)</b>	Led the Virginia Counts Coalition
<b>New Virginia Majority, National Korean American Service &amp; Education Consortium (NAKASEC), Planned Parenthood Advocates of Virginia, Progress Virginia, Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA), Voices for Virginia’s Children</b>	Played key roles in Virginia Counts Coalition
<b>Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers</b>	Convened the 2020 Census Working Group, composed of some funders that provided aligned funding and some that created a pooled fund called Count DMV In, focused on GOTC in the Washington, D.C., region
<b>Consumer Health Foundation, Meyer Foundation, United Way of the National Capital Area, and Bainum Family Foundation</b>	Co-led the 2020 Census Working Group; Consumer Health Foundation, Meyer Foundation, and United Way of the National Capital Area also co-led the Count DMV In pooled fund
<b>Greater Washington Community Foundation</b>	Housed and managed the Count DMV In pooled fund, which was disbursed to Washington, D.C., region nonprofits
<b>Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments</b>	Participated in the 2020 Census Working Group and convened local officials and staff who worked on the census, including in Northern Virginia
<b>Community Foundation for Northern Virginia</b>	Convened the Count the Region initiative, focusing on supporting jurisdictional complete count committees in Northern Virginia
<b>Virginia League of Conservation Voters</b>	Ran a phone-banking campaign

<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

Secretary of the Commonwealth

Led the Virginia Complete Count Commission

## FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Overall, over \$3 million in known state government and philanthropic funding supported census efforts in Virginia. In addition, some organizations and institutions made in-kind donations of staff time that supported efforts.

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

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
Philanthropy: At least \$1,519,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VCET received about \$485,000 in philanthropic funding from multiple sources and distributed funds to nonprofit organizations participating in the Virginia Counts Coalition (sources of funding are unknown).</li><li>• Five regional funders (Bainum Family Foundation, Bernstein Family Foundation, Consumer Health Foundation, Meyer Foundation, and United Way of the National Capital Area) and three national funders (Bauman Foundation, Weissberg Foundation, and Census Equity Fund) contributed to the Count DMV In pooled fund, which made \$144,000 in grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 to nonprofit organizations that worked in Northern Virginia.</li><li>• ACT for Alexandria, Potomac Health Foundation, and Weissberg Foundation contributed a total of \$115,000 in aligned funding to efforts in Northern Virginia.</li><li>• Community Foundation for Northern Virginia contributed funds and in-kind donations (e.g., a full-time project director) through the Count the Region initiative.</li><li>• New Virginia Majority received funds from the National Funders Collaborative, much of which they distributed to their own organizing “hubs”—networks of organizers focused on different populations (amount unknown).</li><li>• The national Census Equity Fund also contributed \$775,000.</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>State Government: <b>About \$1.5 million</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The governor allocated about \$500,000 in 2018 and about \$1 million more in July 2019.</li> <li>• Initial funding was aimed at education and awareness raising through a broad-based media campaign and government agencies and helping set up jurisdictional complete count committees; the second allocation was aimed at outreach (including a texting campaign) and communications (including community-specific toolkits, literature translations, social media campaign), as well as enhancing support for local complete count committees.</li> </ul>
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## DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**VCET and its Virginia Counts Coalition began census outreach efforts with an education campaign and then moved to organizing and field outreach.** In the year prior to GOTC, several Table partners incorporated census awareness into voter engagement and issue advocacy activities, which allowed them to layer census messages on top of other issues people cared about (e.g., political power, education, or health care). At many of these events, partners asked people to sign “pledge cards” stating their intention to complete the census, which would be mailed to them on a date closer to the response period. VCET also held workshops to inform communities throughout the state about the census and how they could get involved in outreach.

**With their target being historically undercounted communities, the coalition focused its organizing and outreach efforts primarily in the “urban crescent”** (which includes the densely populated areas within the North Virginia, Greater Richmond, and Hampton Road regions). They also planned to do outreach in the southwest and Appalachian regions but knew this would be more challenging without local partners in those areas. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition partners planned tabling at community events and office hours to support onsite census completion, and thousands of door knocks. Because many historically undercounted communities are on the wrong side of the digital divide, VCET had purchased tablets and hotspots for partners to use in supporting census form completion throughout the state. Once the pandemic hit, they instead engaged in intensive phone-banking, text-banking, and postcard-writing efforts.

**Virginia nonprofit organizations or “trusted messengers” that were funded through Count DMV In generated community-specific media and communications and leveraged their networks.** Trusted messenger organizations used all types of media to reach their communities of focus. They used social media ads to reach immigrant communities and arranged for community leaders to be interviewed about the census on a popular Spanish-language television series that aired on social media and the local Telemundo station. They also set up guest speakers on their own topical radio show to discuss the importance of the census, created Spanish-language videos explaining how to complete census forms, and distributed flyers with simple messaging. Many used US Census Bureau materials as a starting point, then tailored the information for

specific communities, including links to the Bureau website for additional information and resources. They leveraged existing networks by holding workshops with their client population and answering questions about the census and asking those who had completed the forms to share their experiences. They also expanded their networks to reach a wider range of places and ethnic groups than they could have on their own, such as NAKASEC Virginia's collaboration with five other organizations that focus on various Asian American and Pacific Islander communities throughout the state.

**When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many organizations pivoted** to phone-banking, texting their own networks via WhatsApp and Hustle, and coupling census outreach with efforts to provide material support to their communities, e.g., with food drives and distribution. Almost all the organizations reported challenges related to the early threat of including a citizenship question, ongoing fears of data misuse, and the pervasiveness of misinformation related to both. These challenges were especially difficult to address without face-to-face interactions that were impeded by the pandemic.

**Organizers used various address databases to enable phone and text outreach.** VCET and other partners used Voter Activation Network (VAN) technology to reach registered voters by phone and text. To reach people who were not on voter registration lists, VCET gave coalition partners addresses from the Melissa database (based on consumer data and provided by national State Voices affiliate), which partners used to send handwritten postcards that reminded people to complete the census and provided QR codes and website addresses with community-specific information. VCET learned that voter-registration-based address lists were especially flawed for areas with more currently gentrifying neighborhoods, such as Petersburg, where old apartment buildings are being cleared to make way for newer residences and businesses.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **GOTC would benefit from more transparency, understanding, and openness among government, funder, and nonprofit sectors.** Although the representatives of the Virginia Complete Count Commission attended Virginia Counts Coalition meetings, they were not forthcoming with information about their plans, which made it challenging for the nonprofit leaders to leverage state government investments and activities. When nonprofit leaders tried to influence state and local government plans, they often were met with resistance. For example, nonprofit leaders encouraged a jurisdiction to incorporate census outreach into efforts that provided material assistance during the pandemic, rather than putting up banners, or to set up and staff census completion stations, but these suggestions were rejected. Furthermore, philanthropic funding given to Virginia Counts Coalition partners outside of the coalition structure created resentment among those that did not receive additional funding. In addition, such funding given to nonprofit organizations outside of (and without the knowledge of) the Coalition made it challenging to coordinate effectively and leverage those investments. Lastly, work with jurisdictional partners requires an understanding of the time required to work through approval processes and address restrictions associated with government bureaucracies.
- **Preexisting relationships facilitate early plan-making, collaboration, and pivoting, suggesting that cross-sector and jurisdictional collaboration start earlier.** VCET partners had a long history of collaboration before the 2020 Census efforts, which facilitated a smooth collaboration around the census efforts. The preexisting trusting relationships aided communication to ensure that VCET partners' work was complementary and not duplicative and helped them to adapt and respond to challenges as the work shifted because of the pandemic. Some challenges to transparency and collaboration across sectors could possibly have been mitigated by building cross-sector structures and relationships earlier. Furthermore, although jurisdictions benefitted from the sharing of ideas enabled by the Count the Region initiative, they could have benefitted from a more coordinated statewide or region-wide approach, which may have emerged if they had more time and/or history. More coordination could have amplified efforts that remained more localized, such as a community "census day."
- **Integrating census outreach with other messages and efforts is powerful.** The narrative of layering messages about the importance of the census with other issues people care about, such as politics and community funding for specific issues, worked well in Virginia, as did linking census outreach with direct service and resource provision.

## LOOKING FORWARD

At the time of this writing, the Census 2020 Working Group has two offshoots, and both include funders that invested in and worked on the 2020 Census, plus others. One is a group of funders interested in supporting civic engagement and democracy strengthening strategies. Another is a group of Virginia advocacy funders that, in partnership with VCET, is working to create a funder strategy on redistricting in Virginia. VCET and partners are also working on several additional efforts related to redistricting.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- VCET
- New Virginia Majority
- Consumer Health Foundation

This report also incorporated information from the following documents:

- The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia, *Every Voice Counts: Count the Region Building Community, Trust, and Understanding through the 2020 Decennial Census*, February 2021, [www.cfnova.org/images/CFNOVA\\_CountTheRegionFinalReport.pdf](http://www.cfnova.org/images/CFNOVA_CountTheRegionFinalReport.pdf).
- Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, *2019 Our Region, Our Giving Report*, November 2019, [www.washingtongrantmakers.org/resources/our-region-our-giving-2019](http://www.washingtongrantmakers.org/resources/our-region-our-giving-2019).
- Meeting minutes from Virginia Complete Count Commission meetings through August 2019; [www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/advisory-boards/virginia-complete-count-commission/stay-connected/vccc-meeting-and-agenda-minutes](http://www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/advisory-boards/virginia-complete-count-commission/stay-connected/vccc-meeting-and-agenda-minutes).

## NOTES

- [1] <https://engageva.org/redistricting/>
- [2] The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia, *Every Voice Counts: Count the Region Building Community, Trust, and Understanding through the 2020 Decennial Census*, February 2021, p. 1.
- [3] This is the last meeting for which meeting minutes were made publicly available.