

# WEST 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 West Virginia 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

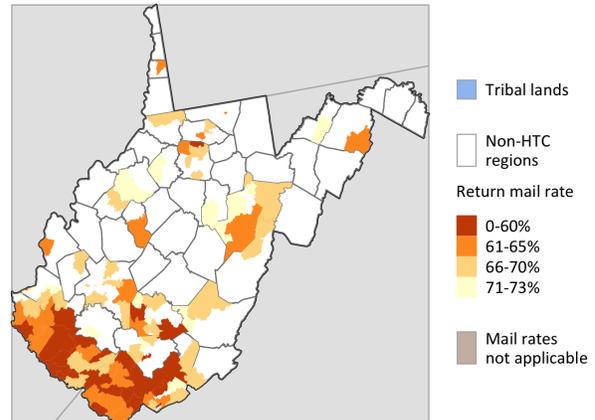
**1,829,054**

TOTAL POPULATION

**442,040**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



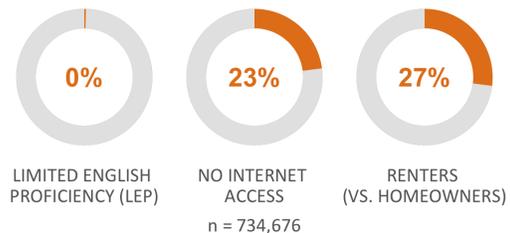
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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).

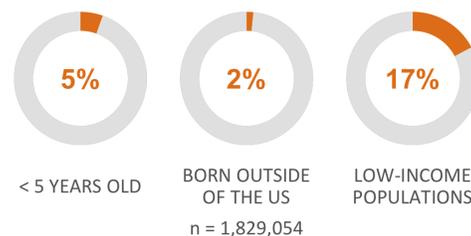
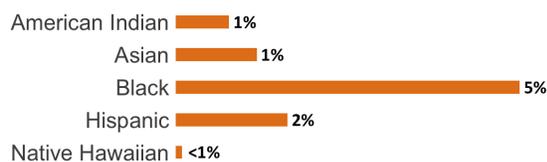
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

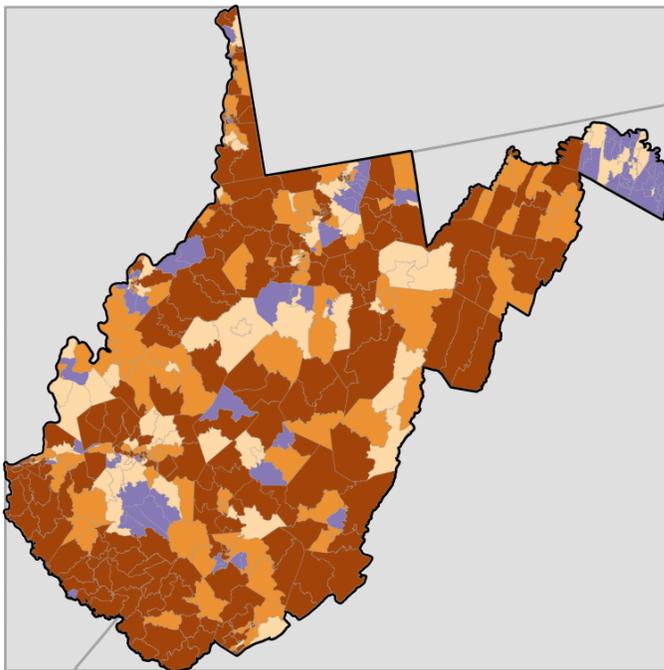




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>-2.9</b>
2010	59.1%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



- No comparable 2010 rate
- 2020 rate < 2010 rate by 10+ points
- 5-10 points below
- Up to 5 points below
- 2020 rate at or above 2010



## STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

A small but tightly networked and resourceful state, West Virginia took a multitiered approach to census efforts. Concerned by the lack of census leadership from the governor's office and recognizing the danger of losing a congressional seat should the state not have a successful count, a joint policy committee within Philanthropy West Virginia and the West Virginia Nonprofit Association, along with other organizations, began advocating for the formation of a State Complete Count Commission in late 2018. In part due to advocacy from groups across the state and census staff, Governor Jim Justice announced the formation of the commission in August 2019. The development of the commission allowed many of the organizational leaders involved or identified through those early advocacy efforts to fill the commission's appointed seats.

The group of nonprofit and philanthropic actors working on the census did not wait for the formation of the State Complete Count Commission to begin planning for a 2020 Census outreach campaign. At the same time that advocacy efforts were underway, nonprofits, community centers, and churches around the state began to self-organize to undertake the census. Under the leadership of the state civic engagement table, Our Future West Virginia (OFWV), the CountMeInWV Coalition came together to organize nonprofit efforts across the state.

The group ultimately grew to include over 28 cross-sector organizations, associations, and individual members. Due to the state's relatively small size, the coalition built off many existing relationships but also formed new relationships to reach different areas of the state with census outreach. The makeup of the coalition consisted mostly of actors focused on improving conditions for West Virginia children and families across two main categories: (1) grassroots organizations advocating for deeper anti-poverty, housing, education, and economic justice, and (2) larger apolitical/advocacy groups with interest in generating improved conditions for residents (e.g., WV United Way Collaborative), as well as those aware of the importance of the census for securing federal funding for the state. The coalition's strength lay in its diversity, with members and their extended networks leveraging bipartisan and multi-faith relationships, both statewide and at local levels. Members included unions, health care organizations, regular grassroots partners, chambers of commerce, libraries, churches, local governments and some county commissions, and city councils and managers. While there was some coordination of efforts across coalition partners with philanthropic and state government actors—including participation on the State Complete Count Commission and some close partnerships between OFWV and local complete count committees—the network of community-based organizations within the CountMeInWV Coalition led the bulk of strategic outreach efforts. Other actors, such as Philanthropy West Virginia, a philanthropic association, played key supporting roles to build infrastructure and secure resources through funder engagement, education, and recruitment efforts.

Beyond the efforts of the CountMeInWV Coalition, the State Complete Count Commission and local complete count committees also contributed to efforts in the state. The State Complete Count Commission focused its

efforts primarily on a broad communications campaign led by the Department of Commerce.

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

Actor	Role
<b>Our Future West Virginia</b>	OFWV (formerly West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition) is a community-based organization which served as a CountMeInWV Coalition leader and regranter. Key activities involved developing census infrastructure from existing state networks and regranting funds as outreach fellowships for individuals and groups focused on reaching target communities.
<b>West Virginia Nonprofit Association, West Virginia Center on Budget &amp; Policy, West Virginia Council of Churches, WV Kids Count, West Virginia Library Association, and West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission</b>	Key statewide partners for reaching the most undercounted populations in the state. Their engagement provided critical resources, such as organizational capacity and volunteers, strategic leverage of their respective networks, and assistance to grassroots partners for local outreach efforts.
<b>WV United Way Collaborative/United Ways of West Virginia</b>	Provided critical census strategy and activities to reach West Virginians statewide, particularly through their 211 health and human service information hotline. Its apolitical standing helped build cross-sector collaborations with local government, the nonprofit network, philanthropy, businesses, and individuals.
<b>Philanthropy West Virginia</b>	Philanthropic member-based association which supported infrastructure development by connecting nonprofits to funders and by providing funder education regarding grantmaking opportunities for census work in the state. Through their seat on the State Complete Count Commission, they advocated for complete count efforts, guided resource allocation, and informed strategy.

<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

**State Complete Count Commission**

A collaborative interface of government officials, community leaders, public service providers, and business representatives for statewide strategic planning and advocacy of the census. The group provided a platform to raise critical questions about complete count activities and helped secure state funds for census outreach to encourage participation.

## FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Historically, West Virginia is in the bottom 10% of per capita philanthropic capital. Collective grantmaking through the state’s foundations totals about \$70 million annually, far less than neighboring states. The bulk of grantmaking by funders in the state is typically focused on meeting basic human needs and addressing the substance use disorder crisis. However, some philanthropic organizations did provide grants to support the 2020 Census efforts. Ultimately, resources for West Virginia census efforts came from a combination of state-appropriated funds, national- and state-level philanthropy, and in-kind contributions of materials and staff time. Those involved in the efforts estimate that about \$1.5 million in resources was leveraged within the state, with approximately \$1 million from state government funding and an estimated \$500,000 in philanthropic dollars. In addition, there were around \$500,000 in in-kind contributions.

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

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<p><b>Philanthropy: About \$500,000</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately half a million philanthropic dollars were deployed to support leading nonprofit organizations working on census efforts. Generally, individual grants ranged between \$25,000 to \$50,000 depending on the organizational needs and the organization’s role in census activities. These funders included statewide and local community foundations, and most of the funding supported organizational capacity for outreach events, such as town hall meetings and community listening sessions.</li> <li>• The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation awarded \$25,000 to the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission for 2020 Census outreach on college campuses to encourage college students and residents of surrounding campus communities to complete the census form. The foundation also awarded \$114,000 to OFWV to support outreach to undercounted populations.</li> <li>• OFWV regranted some funds toward mini-grants or fellowships for statewide grassroots outreach. Approximately 30 teams received \$750 to \$3,500 depending on needs. Much of the grants were stipends to low-income individuals within the community. Teams included West Virginia Family Resource Network (WVFRN) organizations, NAACP county and statewide chapters, and independent libraries.</li> <li>• \$150,000 in funding to OVFV came from the national Census Equity Fund.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State Government: \$1 million</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1 million from the Governor’s Contingency Fund supported 2020 Census marketing. The funds were administered through the West Virginia Department of Commerce’s marketing arm, which bought and managed paid ads to support broader marketing and outreach. No state funds were provided for regranteeing to nonprofits.</li> </ul>
<p><b>In-Kind Contributions: \$500,000+</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-kind contributions included printing costs, media ads, volunteer and in-kind staff time, and business services, such as outreach material design work from a local firm. Key actors estimate the in-kind contributions to exceed the philanthropic dollar totals.</li> <li>• Facebook donated \$20,000 for in-kind ad services, enabling broader digital outreach.</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

**The CountMeInWV Coalition strategy relied on community-based, relational, and apolitical partnerships for high-impact outreach.** As part of the coalition’s strategy to reach the greatest number of people and avoid politicizing the census, OFWV focused on developing partnerships between trusted statewide programs and grassroots organizations performing outreach activities. For example, groups heavily engaged the public through local WVFRN groups, highly active community-based organizations that act as resource hubs for information on social services, resources, and programs unique to each county. Discerning that the best way to reach their target populations would be through the service organizations they work with, OFWV regularly attended WVFRN meetings to present census information. Service provider staff gained a deep understanding of census funding of their own programs and, as many were current or previous recipients of these services, would themselves be informed of the importance of their participation in the census. Promotion and support of the census through state United Ways, churches, and nonprofits focused on healthy families and children also elevated a bipartisan message. State agencies also lifted messaging through census inserts in mailings.

**Ongoing lack of access to broadband led to creative outreach strategies.** West Virginia has a high prevalence of undercounted rural communities due to lack of broadband, which was a leading concern for key actors when planning for a digital census. In response to the public’s critical need for information, the WV United Way Collaborative revamped a statewide health and social services information line in 2019. The 24/7 call center, 211, was thus promoted as a resource to individuals who sought information about completing the census. Another partnership put forward for non-digital outreach involved leveraging public education “STEAM” (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) programming by equipping educational buses with satellite internet so families could complete the census during those events. This tactic, however, was abandoned once social distancing measures took effect due to COVID-19.

**College student leadership encouraged a complete count across campus communities.** Historically, communities with higher learning institutions such as Concord, Athens, Morgantown, and Huntington have had higher undercounts. To reach college students and other populations, Philanthropy West Virginia encouraged a census funder partnership with the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission to secure resources for outreach efforts. Although funding meant for student employment and coordination of campus activities was canceled at the onset of the pandemic, the statewide student government leadership team and student government associations remained highly engaged to safely promote a complete count across campuses.

**Other undercounted populations were reached through a mini-grant program that funded grassroots outreach activities.** Although much of West Virginia qualifies as hard to count due to its rural status, the southern region was of particular focus for its concentration of traditionally undercounted groups, including low-income communities suffering from the collapse of the coal industry and communities of color. For

deeper outreach to undercounted groups, OFWV invited grassroots organizations and community leaders to join the statewide coalition and promoted a mini-grant and fellowship program for outreach work.

**Data played an important role in identifying undercounted communities and developing strategies.** Historic census data of hard-to-count areas, population shift maps, and Kids Count cross-referencing were the primary sources of data used to inform efforts. Due to the prevalence of substance use disorders, West Virginia also has a higher rate of grandparents raising children, and data from programs such as West Virginia State University Healthy Grandfamilies was used to further inform census efforts.

**Lack of state government leadership led to major challenges.** The late formation of the State Complete Count Commission, coupled with unclear communication about the allocation of state funding, created barriers to collaboration.

**COVID-19 affected original outreach strategies.** In response to the pandemic, statewide organizers were sensitive to an older, more at-risk volunteer base and quickly pivoted to socially distant alternatives. Through online platforms, groups frequently cross-posted messaging across networks, engaged creatively through online raffles, and used a large in-kind Facebook ad donation to reach wider internet audiences. Non-virtual activities included “honk-and-waves,” informational road signs, and integrating census information into pandemic relief efforts, such as inserts tucked into food and personal protective equipment distributions. In complete count and relief efforts for particularly vulnerable communities, 11 of the OFWV teams formed community resource stations with census information, Wi-Fi hotspots, laptop access, and COVID-19 testing.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **The coalition approach led to greater collective impact.** Through the many challenges of the 2020 Census, key actors consider the collaborative work achieved with the resources at their disposal a major success. In leveraging OFWV's capacity, partner networks were quickly activated to mobilize around the work. The real-time census count map indicated responses rates two to three times higher than surrounding area tracts, demonstrating that outreach efforts were working.
- **Diverse partnerships created stronger infrastructure with potential to endure.** Collaboration at the grassroots level created a more diverse community network by connecting individuals in the interest of a shared goal. Partnerships with more mainstream or apolitical entities also seemed to unlock greater state-level collaboration through the State Complete Count Commission, enabling conversations around critical questions and improving engagement from local government. New student government and higher education committee partnerships were formed.
- **Increased state and local government leadership is needed for a more complete count.** The nonprofit-led CountMeInWV Coalition was powerful, but key actors wished there had been deeper collaboration and communication from government leadership to avoid confusion and delays for census work across the state.
- **Relationships with trusted community individuals and social service providers improved the count.** The mini-grant program enabled a more diverse network of groups and individuals for census outreach across the state, reaching undercounted groups who would have otherwise been left out. Their involvement led to better messaging and stronger outreach strategies.
- **Rural, wealth-extracted states need greater and earlier consideration from national funding pools.** Many national funder pools did not take rural communities into consideration until later, prioritizing funding rounds for other states. They also did not convene with local philanthropic organizations to understand community needs, potentially creating misalignment with grantees. Although key actors were resourceful in directly connecting interested funders with active organizations, a scaled philanthropic presence to advance census coordination and planning early on could lead to a more complete count.
- **Limitations of technological infrastructure underscore the importance of traditional civic engagement,** such as mass media, canvassing, and relational organizing, as well as creative alternatives such as mobile Wi-Fi hot spots. Majority rural states like West Virginia will likely continue facing technological infrastructure challenges for the next census, and nationally recommended plans could better count communities with limited or no broadband by offering adaptive programming, strategies, and outreach.

## LOOKING FORWARD

As demonstrated in its 2020 Census efforts, West Virginia's ongoing funding and capacity needs have made the state resourceful and agile at leveraging available resources. Key actors believe some county-level partnerships will be lasting. For example, the CountMeInWV Coalition's community resource stations were immediately refashioned for voting outreach and are now being considered for their potential as permanent civic engagement spaces. Going forward, lagging technological and civic engagement infrastructure presents challenges. There was a perception among some of those involved in efforts that there is an opportunity for national funders, some of whom benefited from resource extraction in the West Virginia region, to help fill capacity-building needs. Improved government leadership could enable earlier and more effective efforts.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Our Future West Virginia
- Philanthropy West Virginia