

WISCONSIN

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 populations¹ 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 Wisconsin based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=2).

¹We 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

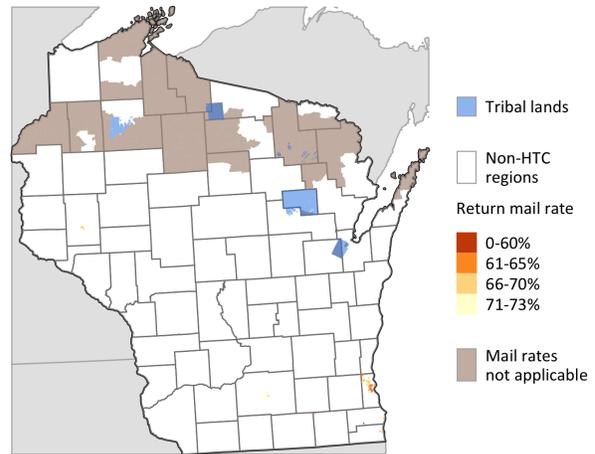
5,778,394

TOTAL POPULATION

611,475

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



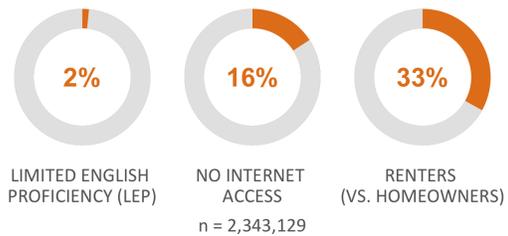
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

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.

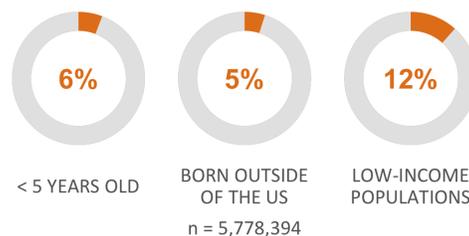
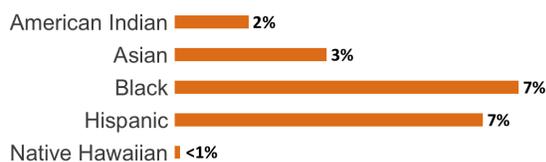
HOUSEHOLDS

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



INDIVIDUALS

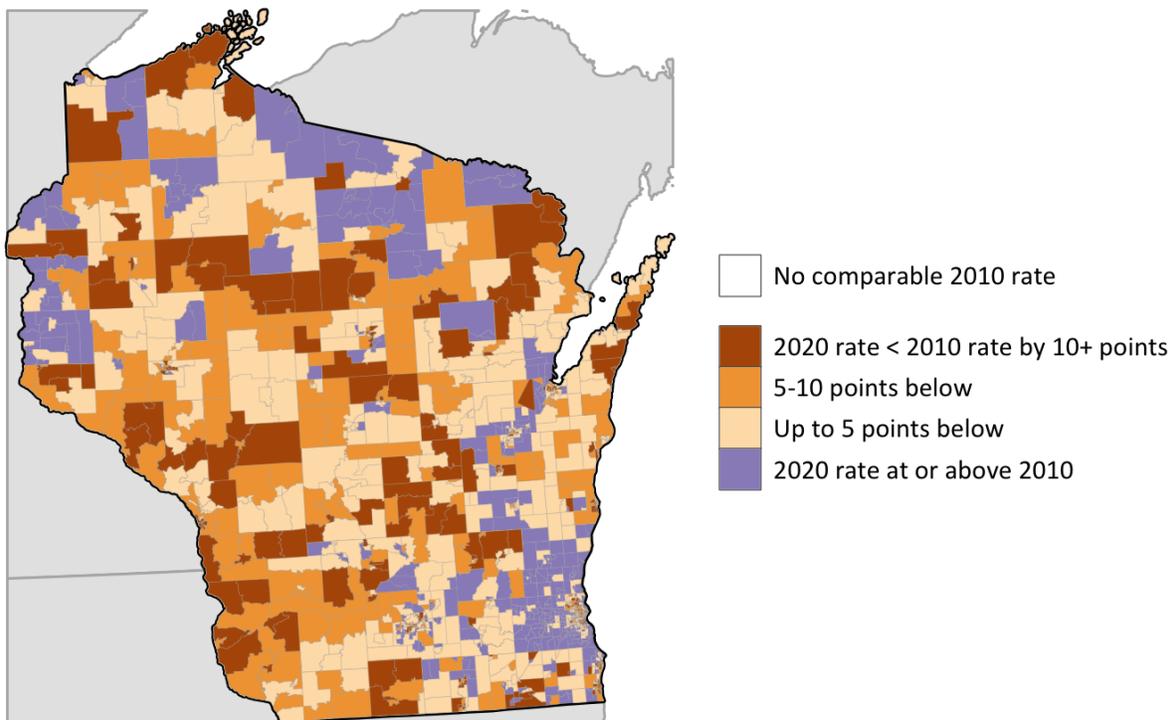
Percent of total number of individuals in the state that have characteristics of historically undercounted populations:



OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	72.2%	-1.3
2010	73.5%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Political factors have had a large influence on census efforts within the state of Wisconsin. In 2018, Wisconsin held elections to determine control of the state's governorship and legislature. The result of the election was that the Democratic candidate for governor, Tony Evers, unseated the incumbent Scott Walker; Republicans maintained control of both houses of the Wisconsin legislature. The new governor was supportive of a robust state effort to Get Out the Count (GOTC) for the 2020 Census and proposed to allocate \$1 million of state funding to support the state-level census effort. However, because of opposition from the Republican-controlled legislature, this funding was stripped from the budget. Ultimately, the governor was able to convene a State Complete Count Committee by executive order, with the goal of educating and raising awareness about the census, but efforts were ultimately limited because of a lack of funding.

Recognizing that, due to political factors, the state would not be able to allocate as many resources as hoped to support robust census outreach—as well as the importance of the census count for determining the support of vital federal programs—philanthropic, nonprofit, and local state government actors in Wisconsin came together in 2019 to plan efforts to support an accurate and complete census count. Philanthropic and nonprofit organizations sought to bring resources to bear from both local and national funders to support GOTC efforts within the state. Early on, the Joyce Foundation and the Funders Census Initiative [1] worked to bring together funders within the state, partnering with Wisconsin Philanthropy Network and the nonprofit Wisconsin Voices (WIV).

WIV led efforts to conduct census outreach throughout the state, both recruiting local organizations to work on the ground in communities and serving as a resource hub to coordinate and support local efforts. Beyond its network of about 65 partners—predominantly serving young people and Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as key issue-based groups—WIV coordinated closely with state, local, and federal governments and the United Way to ensure alignment of GOTC efforts in the state, as well as with local complete count committees to conduct local GOTC work.

GOTC efforts in Wisconsin built off existing collaborations in two networks. First, WIV utilized the statewide civic engagement nonprofit network as its table, leading the network of nonprofit clusters in the southeast Wisconsin, Greater Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, and Kenosha areas. Secondly, WIV leveraged the local and regional United Way network around the state. Although there was some collaboration with local complete count committees and government administrations, the partnership with city officials and administration for the City of Milwaukee were of particular importance because of their good recordkeeping of previous census efforts and ability to offer more outreach and coordination assistance for one of the largest concentrations of undercounted populations in the state.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts²:

Actor	Role
Wisconsin Voices	Led and coordinated nonprofit efforts related to the census, drawing from its civic engagement nonprofit network and acting as a both a hub for statewide and targeted outreach work, as well as regranted to community nonprofits. Regranted about 10 organizations from their network of 65 partners.
United Way	Collaborated with WIV for outreach efforts with local community and complete count committee groups, leveraging its strong existing network and resources.
Wisconsin Philanthropic Network	Engaged and recruited funders through their statewide network. They are the only philanthropic association within the state at this time.
The Joyce Foundation	Involved nationally as part of the Democracy Funders Collaborative’s Census Subgroup and supported the state-level collaborative for each state across the Great Lakes. They supported the funding and some coordination of efforts in Wisconsin. WIV is a regular grantee of the Joyce Foundation’s Democracy Program.

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

At least \$29,000 from philanthropy supported census efforts in the state, but the total is unknown. Although there also was no pooled fund or formalized hub for funding, there was much communication and outreach to funders through the series of efforts by the four coordinating organizations, the Joyce Foundation, WIV, the Funders Census Initiative, and the Wisconsin Philanthropy Network. Initially, two in-person meetings for funders in Madison and Milwaukee served to generate funder interest, as well as individual outreach to funders in organizations’ networks. Subsequent webinars tried to engage the interest of funders in the northern parts of the state that did not yet have a high level of participation.

²Data 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

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach³

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<p>Philanthropy: At least \$29,000 but the total is unknown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders involved chose to support different mechanisms to support GOTC in Wisconsin, based on their areas of work, geography, and organizational partners. Some funders chose not to contribute because of the political context in their region. Some funding was directed to WIV for regranting and supporting the work of the hub, whereas other funding was directed toward regional and local grantee organizations or local complete count committees to conduct outreach. Funds were distributed to many regions throughout the state, with resources more heavily concentrated toward outreach to hard-to-count populations in southeast Wisconsin and the Greater Milwaukee area, as well as Madison and some tribal communities in northern Wisconsin. • Madison Community Foundation, UW Health, National Guardian Life, Alliant Energy, and the CUNA Mutual Group pooled together \$29,000 to fund outreach by local community centers to help their residents, especially those who are typically undercounted, complete the census.
<p>State Government: \$0</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>In-Kind Contributions: Unknown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknown

DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Outreach strategies were motivated by the desire to reach the biggest populations of undercounted groups.

Local groups involved were motivated to participate in census outreach for issue-based, community organizing, and funding considerations. For example, some local groups were motivated by the fact that the census count is a central factor in determining allocations of federal resources, whereas others were interested in ensuring an accurate count for the purpose of redistricting. Efforts on the ground were primarily conducted by local nonprofits and complete count committees with support from the United Way and WIV. As a regranter and hub organizer, WIV first prioritized partners that could quickly mobilize to reach the target

³Funding 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

undercounted communities and led two census convenings to share resources with the greater hub network. Geographically, most of these target communities were concentrated in the City of Milwaukee, with some focus on Racine and Madison.

Digital media and communication capacities were critically leveraged by key actors. WIV offered digital media and communications resources to network partners and guided digital and social media outreach strategies. They produced sponsored ads and social media content that were shared across the network and translated to other languages through partner collaboration. A robust digital presence and engagement were particularly important in the state because traditional census advertising was relatively limited from a lack of resources. Creative outreach strategies were deployed to recruit organizations to participate in census efforts, however, such as a key actor dressing as a census-themed superhero, in efforts to educate organizations across the state.

The concept of “relational organizing” was the focal point of outreach strategies, especially for undercounted groups. Notably, Wisconsin has a long legacy of segregation that especially affects the Black community. Those leading census efforts in the state were intentional about identifying local partner organizations that would be seen as credible messengers within the Black community, among others, to encourage participation in the census. The relational organizing model was thus well suited for the state, and it involved network recruitment of leaders throughout communities to instruct them to map their personal networks and commit to some form of outreach action. While dozens of community-based nonprofits mobilized through this model, the most active partners included Voces de la Frontera, a Latinx immigrant rights organization; the Hmong American Women’s Association, representing the biggest Asian American and Pacific Islander and recent refugee community; Wisconsin Conservation Voices, serving Indigenous groups and tribes; Southside Organizing Center, which serves some of the most undercounted populations in southern Milwaukee; and WISDOM, a network of Black congregations and churches. The latter two organizations played essential roles in door-knocking campaigns. This work was supported by ensuring that materials were appropriately translated so that linguistically diverse communities in the state could participate in the census.

Local data was gathered and shared to customize outreach efforts. WIV activated a data and field team to aggregate and synthesize data, including Census Bureau and City University of New York maps and University of Wisconsin data, and to understand the census tracts and prioritize the work. Using the data gathered, they formed a projection of the most undercounted communities and census tracts in the state and set a door-to-door goal for outreach before the COVID-19 pandemic. In collaboration with eight organizations, “data snapshots” of census tracts with customized demographic information about undercounted groups in those communities were generated. Although broader sets of data were used for overall outreach activities, these customized maps offered additional guidance to target communities and were often offered to associated local complete count committees to support their coordination.

A highly politicized battleground state environment led to major challenges for securing a complete count.

For example, the challenges to the presidential primaries across Wisconsin, especially in Milwaukee, led to fallout which affected groups working on GOTC, many of which were also working on voting outreach. In addition, protests in response to the shooting of Jacob Blake also inflamed tensions in the state, especially around Kenosha, which also impacted census activities. The event-specific politicization added to some tension sensed between federal-level actors and mobilizing groups, the latter of which were frustrated that the federal agents could not speak freely about the census seemingly because of its politicization or were simply unaware of how to organize an effective campaign.

COVID-19 posed some challenges for the campaign. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, local groups used tactics such as canvassing to get the word out about the census, often at the same time combining census efforts with outreach related to voter registration. Once the pandemic hit, groups had to shift tactics accordingly, with many relying on text and phone banking when reliable phone contact lists were available.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **A blend of nonpolitical messaging and outreach through relational organizing worked well for the state.** Key actors believe that census efforts in the state were successful in developing messaging that would resonate across political lines. The campaign also benefited from its strong racial equity focus, which engaged authentically with communities of color as partners. A capacity to organize high-quality, culturally responsive digital campaigns supported this work.
- **Existing infrastructure from strong functioning organizations created an efficient statewide collaboration.** WIV and the United Way leveraged their existing networks and deep relationships in the community to mobilize quickly once activities commenced. Their strong existing relationships made the process of regranteeing as feasible and as efficient as possible. WIV, as an organizing hub, could weave work across sector partners.
- **Activating the local partner network led to deeper, more authentic engagement with undercounted groups.** The local partner organizations benefited from their deep relationships, coupled with cultural and linguistic knowledge, that enabled them to work effectively in historically undercounted communities. The integration of census work into COVID-19 response efforts by way of mutual aid work, healthcare supplies, and food provisions also boosted GOTC efforts.
- **An earlier start could produce more thoughtful partnerships, messaging, and funding structures.** Beginning in 2019 was not sufficient; a “longer runway” for the planning, funding, and partnership development would have allowed more thoughtful decisions about structure and partnership roles. Earlier funding could have also resulted in better messaging research and, by extension, better management of the political polarization of the census, which seemed especially heightened and caught many organizers by surprise. In hindsight, pushing for census appropriations before the 2018 election could have potentially sidestepped the challenges of securing funds in a politicized environment post-election. Finally, an earlier start could have led to a pooled fund structure, which other states used for more nimble aggregation, coordination, and disbursement of funds with success.
- **Politicization of the census posed challenges in partnership development** with potential supporters and partners across public, philanthropic, and private sectors. It may have especially caused hesitation from the private sector, which was not highly engaged in census activities, and from some state philanthropies sensitive to census politics.

LOOKING FORWARD

Key actors believe that above all, the relationships and capacities built from 2020 Census efforts will endure, including important lessons of how to navigate state administration census activities and how to identify and engage appropriate actors. Wisconsin also demonstrated the value and effectiveness of the relational organizing model, with about 78,000 people mapped and tracked, presenting an encouraging sign of the development of the network. The hope is that centering and uplifting grassroots leadership among undercounted communities will be an enduring model used across civic engagement efforts. Finally, Wisconsin's census work is currently underfunded, and there is room for more bold leadership from state philanthropy to fill this gap.

DATA SOURCES

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

- The Joyce Foundation–Democracy Program
- Wisconsin Voices

NOTES

[1] Organized by the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation.