

WYOMING

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 Wyoming 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

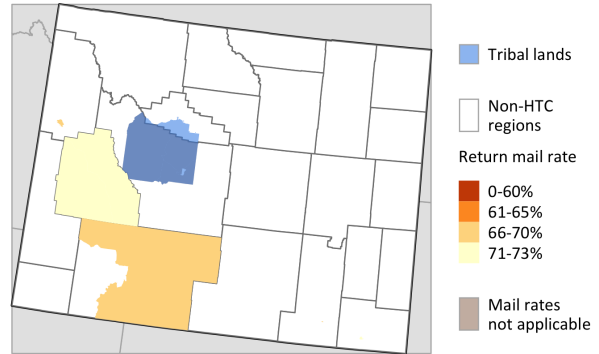
581,836

TOTAL POPULATION

48,611

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



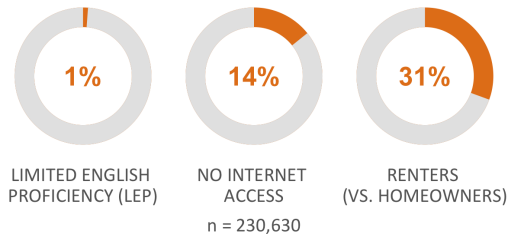
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

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.

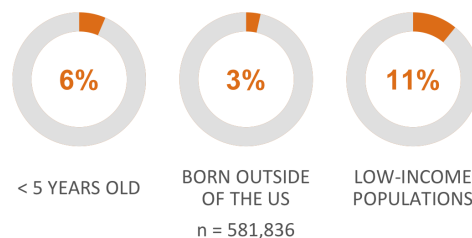
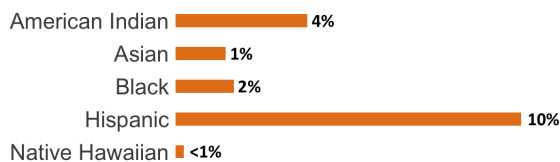
HOUSEHOLDS

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:

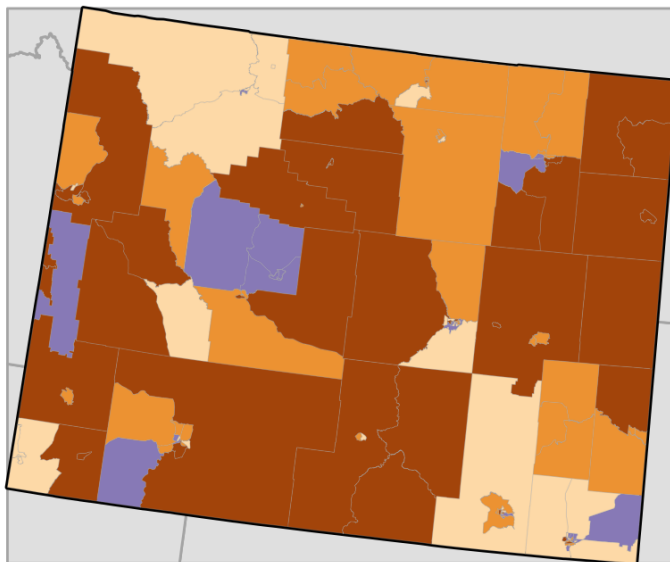




OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	61.1%	-2.3
2010	63.4%	

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

As the least populated state, Wyoming's 2020 Census efforts experienced some capacity-related challenges with funding and infrastructure development. Census activities commenced with newly elected Governor Mark Gordon's proclamation recognizing the importance of the census and establishing a State Complete Count Committee in June 2019. However, the State Complete Count Committee did not receive state funding for census activities, which affected the capacity for collaboration and outreach across key actors. Lacking sufficient funding from state government and philanthropy, the state's census infrastructure primarily took shape from membership within the State Complete Count Committee, composed mainly of government agencies and a dozen other organizations representing agriculture, business, and community interests. Delays in mobilizing efforts prevented key actors from developing a cohesive strategy, instead leading to asynchronous collaboration across key actors within and outside the State Complete Count Committee and creating conditions that favored more localized efforts.

While the State Complete Count Committee began meeting regularly throughout fall of 2019, other efforts to activate an existing small network of organizations in support of census activities began at this time. Wyoming Nonprofit Network (WNN) and its census work funder, Wyoming Community Foundation (WCF), were among the key non-governmental actors who worked closely with the US Census Bureau partnership specialist to lead early mobilizing and exchange census information. In February 2020, WNN attended the state legislative session to inform and garner support for the census from legislators and partners in attendance. Participation of local complete count committees varied by county, with some counties—including those experiencing population booms related to the state's energy industries—more engaged in increasing response rates to boost funding of local services than counties with flat or declining populations. Organizations later leveraged for outreach efforts included Wyoming 2-1-1, head starts, community-based nonprofits, colleges and universities, and public libraries.

Unless participating in a joint effort, groups working on complete count activities mostly acted independently and were engaged through regular updates with information on response rates and recommended strategies. In the absence of funds, the expectation was to support census activities with resources and capacities within reach of individual organizations, agencies, and counties. For example, the Wyoming Rural Electric Association, a community representative on the State Complete Count Committee that represents over a dozen electric power distribution and generation cooperatives, was tasked with providing their co-op members with census information for distribution to rural household consumers.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts²:

Actor	Role
Wyoming Nonprofit Network	Statewide organization that supported strategy, mobilization, and advocacy efforts in support of census activities while working closely with other key actors, such as WCF and the census partnership specialist. Its leadership is connected to ALIGN, a nonprofit that served on the State Complete Count Committee.
Wyoming Community Foundation	The only statewide grantmaking organization. As a Kids Count partner, they mobilized groups across the state in support of census activities, including funding and outreach. They also facilitated a funders forum that included discussions about opportunities to support census work.
US Census Bureau Partnership Specialist	The specialist provided critical engagement across key-actor organizations and local complete count committees to enhance outreach strategies.

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

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

Resources for Wyoming’s census efforts came from a combination of philanthropy and in-kind contributions of materials and staff time. Overall, those involved in the efforts estimate that over \$12,500 in resources were leveraged within the state, mostly in philanthropic dollars, as well as through an unknown amount of in-kind contributions.

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach³

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
Philanthropy: +\$12,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WNN received \$1,500 from WCF and \$1,000 from Foundation for the Episcopal Dioceses of Wyoming for promotion of the census, including designing, printing, and mailing outreach materials. • LOR Foundation awarded a total of \$10,000 in the form of \$1,000 “instagrants” to nonprofits working to increase census response rates in rural Wyoming.
State Government: \$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state chose not to allocate funding to support the work of the State Complete Count Committee
In-Kind Contributions: Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many organizations contributed staff time and other resources to census efforts within the state.

DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Broader outreach efforts were responsive to the needs of a mostly rural, dispersed population by leveraging existing networks and prioritizing the mailing of census information. Wyoming’s rural, sparse population poses challenges for complete count efforts statewide, especially in counties where internet access is unavailable or unreliable. Some strategic partnerships were developed to provide a range of engagement opportunities, such as inviting Wyoming 2-1-1, the health and human services hotline, to engage with the State Complete Count Committee and keep the public informed with the latest census information. WCF also partnered with the Wyoming Library Association to create outreach materials for distribution,

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

leveraging the statewide library system which had planned on serving as computer access and information hubs before the pandemic. Census mailers were sent to outlets such as head starts, food banks, safe houses, and other health and public service providers across the state, and “Low Income Energy Assistance” mailers were outfitted with census information to reach households in need of utility payment assistance. Wyoming Public Television aired an interview with census information to reach television audiences, and some groups engaged the public on social media.

Census messaging focused on basic information about the census and dispelling common misconceptions, including reinforcing the message that census data collection is safe and private even through digital submission and when utilizing public spaces for internet access. Some members of the public were generally distrusting of the government handling their information, and others were sensitive to the politicization of the census and harbored additional anti-government sentiment that kept them disengaged from census participation. As politics became more entrenched, public sentiments led to pushback for census outreach at some events.

Key actors supported efforts to engage other undercounted groups, such as Indigenous and Latinx residents, by helping to produce outreach materials and informing strategies. Aside from rural populations, other undercounted groups in Wyoming include the Eastern Shoshone and the Northern Arapaho tribes within the Wind River Indian Reservation and some Latinx communities, which represent a growing demographic in the state. Key actors focused on supporting counties with the largest known representation of these undercounted groups, enhancing the independent work of their community-led efforts. For example, in Teton County, where Latinx groups were concentrated, key actors aided community groups in creating culturally responsive outreach materials. Leveraging their knowledge that tribal communities were active on social media, partners developed a successful outreach strategy that included targeted Facebook ads that resulted in 2,200 clicks directly to the census page.

COVID-19 affected original census promotion and funding plans, including a key partnership with the State Library to promote participation at in-person events. Outreach strategies involving in-person tabling at popular outlets and events were canceled. The pandemic also affected the capacity of groups and individuals to collaborate on census activities as many shifted focus to pandemic relief work. Funding priorities also shifted to expediting grants for nonprofits working on pandemic aid and relief. Delayed canvassing efforts in response to the pandemic also caused challenges with the count.

Lack of funding and the logistical barriers of engaging various communities across a sparsely populated rural state contributed to challenges. Wyoming’s roughly half million residents live across 23 counties ranging in population between a few thousand to 60,000 people in its most populous urban area of Cheyenne. The small size of the state affects access to resources, and the handful of state-based funders were limited in their capacity to support census activities. The state’s population distribution also creates logistical challenges for outreach activities, such as certain communities lacking local printing services to effectively partner with small organizations in isolated areas and popular utilization of postal boxes which makes it difficult to reach certain

households. Counties affected by energy sector booms are also challenged by transient individuals who misidentify their location on the census.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **As a small, sparsely populated state, Wyoming faces distinct and persistent battles with census funding, capacities, and messaging.** The state's size means that it is unlikely to face redistricting challenges, which decreases the strength of advocacy for government and national philanthropic funding of census work in the state. The unlikelihood of securing additional federal representation also affects traditional messaging and dampens public engagement with the census.
- **The State Complete Count Committee was resourceful in asynchronous activities but key actors believe it could have had more impact through state funds and the development of a strategic plan.** Ideally, state funds would be secured early on to develop strategies and promote clear, universal messaging about the impacts of an undercount to state and local funding, such as how it affects funding for road infrastructure.
- **Complete count activities would have benefitted from earlier and more structured efforts, including improved attempts to engage more meaningfully with community-based leadership.** With insufficient funds, current census infrastructure relies on the existing, already-stretched capacities of state government agencies and a few key actors with community interests. Developing relationships with more community-based groups and leaders could diversify strategies for reaching undercounted populations, strengthen collaboration, and create a stronger legacy of shared knowledge.
- **Social media campaigns to reach undercounted residents of the Wind River Indian Reservation proved successful and will serve as a model for digital engagement strategies in the future.** Key actors believe that earlier and larger investments towards reaching Latinx communities similarly through social media could have produced a higher response rate from that undercounted group.

LOOKING FORWARD

The state infrastructure for census work has a promising future. Many key actors, including Governor Mark Gordon's administration, agreed that the state must allocate dollars towards the next census. Connections formed within the WCF's funders group will endure and lead to a more structured approach for state funder support of the work. Funding secured earlier could serve to leverage the structure developed for the 2020 Census, enhancing collaboration with existing partners. Expanding key-actor capacities could also enable more equity, diversity, and inclusion with community-based groups representing undercounted populations for improved census strategy development and outreach activities.



DATA SOURCES

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

- Wyoming Community Foundation
- Wyoming Nonprofit Network