



CountDMVIn Census 2020

Community Action
in the Washington,
DC Region

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PHOTO CREDIT: Census 2020: What Worked, What Didn't and Looking Ahead January 2021 Convening. Graphic recording Artist Sara Yukimoto-Saltman

I. Introduction



The U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 2) mandates a complete census count of all residents every 10 years, marking where they were living on April 1.

Years of planning go into generating this vital data, which are crucially important on multiple levels. Census data have been used to determine where government allocates our tax dollars for new schools, hospitals, roads, sewers, and other critical infrastructure. The data determine federal resources for maternal and child health, Head Start, supplemental food programs, subsidized housing, and many other services. Companies use census data when considering where to pursue business opportunities. This information also determines the number and apportionment of congressional seats that will prevail for the next 10 years.

More than ever, a complete and accurate census count is critical for advancing racial equity in the Washington, DC area, where the census count has historically failed to include disproportionate numbers of people of color, immigrants, young children, people with low incomes, and those in rural households. It is estimated that the 2010 Census missed more than 55,000 individuals in the Washington, DC region, which includes the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia (collectively called the DMV).

The 2020 Census Working Group of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (WRAG) is issuing this report to highlight some of the activities that were undertaken by community groups, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and the philanthropic sector in the region to ensure that we had an accurate 2020 Census. The report will share community engagement efforts and lessons learned, describe the grantmaking that was important to those efforts, and provide a look at planning for Census 2030. It is based on information available at the time of publication. In addition to this report, WRAG has an archive of more than 120 census materials from organizations active in 2020, which can be accessed at tinyurl.com/WRAGCensus.



“The data determine federal resources for maternal and child health, Head Start, supplemental food programs, subsidized housing, and many other services.”

II. National Context



The census work was undertaken in the context of an unprecedented pandemic, a national reckoning on race sparked by high-profile incidents of police violence toward people of color, and protests against those and other injustices perpetrated for hundreds of years upon Black communities.

All of these greatly exacerbated the existing digital divide, making it much harder to access the census, which in 2020 was being conducted for the first time electronically. As the country entered 2020, the upcoming presidential election also marked the year as one of remarkable opportunity for civic action. However, this was all put on hold as the country suddenly had to face the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge to ensuring a complete and accurate census count. Public safety guidelines disallowing large group events and meetings and requiring physical distancing were put in place, bringing an abrupt end to outreach strategies based on in-person engagement. The previous Administration's interference was another barrier, as it pushed to add a citizenship question to the Census 2020 form during a time of extreme political polarization. Among communities of color, such factors only heightened mistrust in the government generally and the Census in particular. In addition, the 2020 Census was positioned to be the most high-tech census ever because it prioritized online completion of the form, which would underscore the digital divide in many communities that lacked sufficient internet access and home computing equipment.



PHOTO CREDIT: Many Languages One Love (MLOV)



The most high-tech census ever would underscore the digital divide in many communities that lack sufficient internet access and home computing equipment.

III. Census Results

RESPONSE RATES



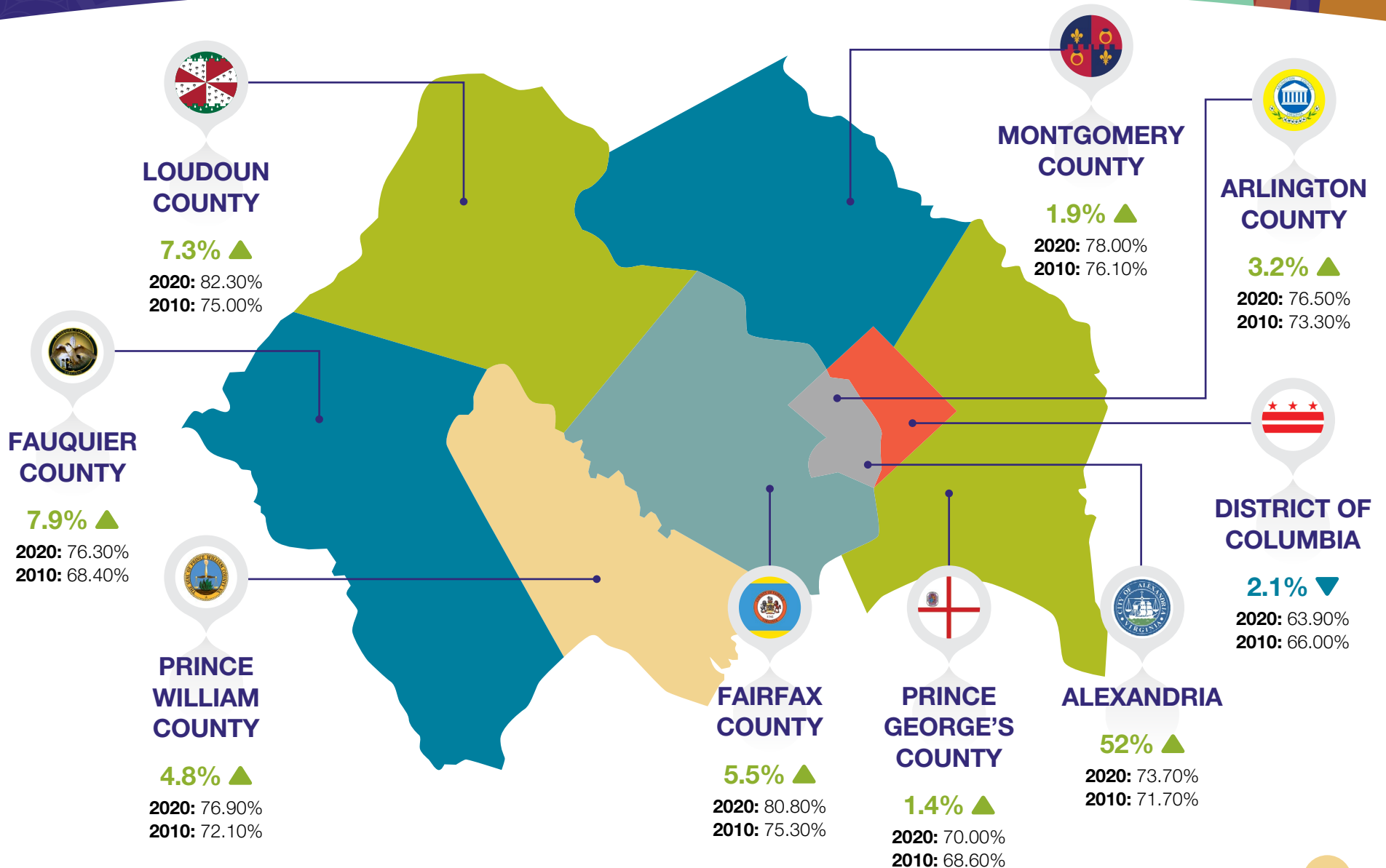
The 2020 Census data showed higher self-response rates (residents responding on their own, before follow-up) for every jurisdiction in our region compared to 2010, except for the District of Columbia. Note that the U.S. Census Bureau said that its non-response follow-up and additional extrapolation raised all state response rates to 99.9%.

JURISDICTIONS	2020 SELF-RESPONSE	2010 SELF-RESPONSE	
Alexandria, VA	73.70%	71.70%	▲
Arlington County, VA	76.50	73.30	▲
District of Columbia	63.90	66.00	▼
Fairfax County, VA	80.80	75.30	▲
Fauquier County, VA	76.30	68.40	▲
Loudoun County, VA	82.30	75.00	▲
Montgomery County, MD	78.00	76.10	▲
Prince George's County, MD	70.00	68.60	▲
Prince William County, VA	76.90	72.10	▲

Source: United States Census Bureau Response Rates as of December 2020 and for 2010

III. Census Results

RESPONSE RATES



III. Census Results

POPULATION GROWTH



District of Columbia
689,545 | 14.6% ▲



Maryland
6,177,224 | 7.0% ▲



Virginia
8,631,393 | 7.9% ▲

The final census data showed significant population increases from 2010 to 2020 of 14.6% for DC, 7.9% for Virginia and 7.0% for Maryland (compared to an overall increase of 7.4% for the U.S.).

Overall, the combined efforts of community groups, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and the philanthropic sector in the Washington, DC region contributed to higher overall responses than in the 2010 Census.

IV. Community Engagement



In the face of the significant challenges cited above, community groups, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and the philanthropic sector pivoted and revised their plans. They correctly concluded that learning and addressing the unique challenges of local communities was paramount to a successful 2020 Census. Philanthropic decisions were informed by understanding the level of engagement by nonprofit organizations and gathering information directly from stakeholders.

Engagement with Local Communities

In late March 2020, foundations that were part of WRAG's 2020 Census Working Group issued a survey to collect information from community groups and nonprofit organizations to inform the direction of the foundations' funding moving forward. Using a survey tool, email, and phone calls, the organizations were asked:

1. How is the Covid-19 pandemic impacting the populations you support?
2. As social distancing is practiced, what changes would you like to make to reach hard-to-count populations for Census 2020 outreach?
3. Who are some of the other groups/partners you are working with to support your Census 2020 efforts?
4. Is there anything you would like to add regarding the impact of Covid-19 on your Census 2020 efforts?"

The overall response from groups was that they were doing the best that they could in the face of uncertainty about managing the pandemic and census outreach. They shared both programmatic and operational challenges. One group reported:

We were hoping to use some of the funds to increase our capacity by providing stipends to our members to support this work. This process will be a little more difficult, and we will most likely only be able to pay folks for phone banking efforts, which might not start right away. That being said, overall, our capacity to do this outreach has definitely decreased because of the crisis.

As information about the pandemic was emerging, nonprofits remained on the front lines. Restrictions were changing the way these groups were connecting with their constituents. The pandemic limited in-person engagements. National policymakers created confusion. But nonprofits understood the community response to these changes and used that information to continue to pursue a complete count.

Pivot in Census Efforts

Nonprofits developed unique and innovative methods to engage their communities. In a virtual conversation with community and nonprofit organizations in July 2020, they discussed the following questions by geographic jurisdiction:

1. What is working?
2. What is not working?
3. What would make the difference to increase the Census 2020 response rate in our region in its remaining three months (August – October)?

PHOTO CREDIT: DC Government Spanish Language Outreach



At that point, the Census Bureau had been wavering in setting an end date for the count. However, October appeared likely to be the last opportunity for people to fill out the census form, despite national advocacy to extend the deadline into December. Nonprofits shared how they pivoted their census efforts and described the educational and outreach activities that were working well. These included:

- Organizing fun Census games nights, trivia nights, DC Census 2020 polls, and Paint and Chat around the census to create spaces that were engaging and participatory
- Partnering with other organizations, such as food distribution centers, to get Census 2020 materials out to communities.
- Developing a QR code to complete the Census 2020 form via smartphone and providing tablets so people could respond to the Census 2020 survey with ease and efficiency.
- Creating Census 2020 how-to videos and in-language social media to inform and educate communities not targeted by mainstream efforts that were mainly in English.
- Developing social media live talks and Interviews that authentically illustrated what happens when communities are not counted.

- Mutual aid groups organizing food drives, voting events, and community meetings. They included Census 2020 information as part of their ongoing aid efforts, as they leveraged their trust and understanding of communities to boost engagement.
- Holding socially distanced pop-up events that distributed Census 2020 materials to ensure that the minimal in-person activities people were engaging in also connected with the Census Bureau.
- Leveraging the creativity and engagement of youth in outreach efforts, since young artists and activists are often trusted messengers in their communities.

Some of the suggestions by nonprofits included additional efforts which they could have undertaken if they had had more capacity, such as:

- Meeting people at checkout lines in grocery stores where they were congregating
- Creating self-serve kiosks for filling out the census forms which could address the digital divide and provide access to Wi-Fi
- Partnering with school systems and using their distance learning platforms
- Developing more media and social media step-by-step guides in multiple languages to complete the census

Some of the major challenges for nonprofits were the lack of adequate language support from local and national institutions, difficulty reaching out to individuals who were experiencing housing insecurity, and accessing housing complexes to share information.

Mutual aid groups

During the pandemic, nonprofit organizations adjusted their educational and outreach programs by utilizing virtual spaces, social media and other online methods. Mutual aid networks, which undertake community organizing and provide direct services to address basic needs such as food and housing, also shifted their outreach efforts to ensure that safety and public health guidelines were followed. As an example, the Ward 7 and Ward 8 Mutual Aid Networks in DC conducted outreach by including census materials in grocery deliveries. This was an important effort to reach families who were impacted by the digital divide. Prince George's County Mutual Aid included census flyers in the meals that were delivered to more than 230 families. An organization in Virginia also distributed flyers to 12,000 households through its food distribution.



PHOTO CREDIT: NAKASEC - Korean Language Outreach

V. Grantmaking



PHOTO CREDIT: Justice for Muslims Collective

In spring 2018, WRAG created the 2020 Census Working Group to convene, educate, and mobilize foundations to leverage their collective resources in support of a fair and accurate Census 2020 count. Funders were encouraged to

1

Connect with their Grantee Partners on Engaging Hard-to-Count Communities

2

Invest in the CountDMVIn Funding Collaborative

3

Join WRAG's 2020 Census Working Group



The CountDMVIn funding collaborative was managed by the Greater Washington Community Foundation. It awarded grants to community and nonprofit organizations to conduct outreach and education, and provide assistance to traditionally under-counted communities. In addition to the funding collaborative, other foundations provided support directly to nonprofit organizations. All told, more than \$500,000 in grants was awarded by foundations to support organizations in the Washington, DC region from fall 2019 to summer 2020.

VI. Beyond Grantmaking



In addition to providing grants to nonprofit and community organizations, the foundations also undertook other activities to support work on the census, including:

Regional forum

Members of WRAG's 2020 Census Working Group convened a regional forum in June 2019 entitled "Interventions that Work: Census 2020 & the Hard-to-Reach Communities." More than 300 participants from nonprofit organizations, foundations, and local governments in the region participated in the forum, which provided tools and interventions that could be used to reach those communities most likely to be undercounted. These communities included young children, immigrants, refugees, low-income renters, transient populations, older adults, and communities of color.

Fact sheets

Members of the Working Group produced fact sheets for each jurisdiction, which emphasized the importance of a fair and accurate Census 2020 count and provided data for the census tracts that were at risk of being undercounted in their respective jurisdictions. The fact sheets were designed as handouts for nonprofit staff to use.

Communications and social media

Working Group members posted blogs and articles and included resources for the Census 2020 on their websites. A micro-site developed by the United Way of the National Capital Area aggregated and collated these communications tools and resources by community and topic. The United Way of the National Capital Area, in partnership with several community stakeholders, also created and produced a CountDMVIn video to communicate the importance of a fair and accurate count.

Funders Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP):

FCCP's Funders Census Initiative served as an important information resource on the challenges faced by organizations across the country, plans of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, updates from the Census Bureau, and future efforts as a follow-up to the census. The Census Equity Fund also provided a grant to support these efforts in the region.

Count the Region

The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia (CFNOVA) launched "Count the Region," an initiative that promoted census participation through the formation of a "Northern Virginia Complete Count Committee" and a smaller subcommittee of local government. Count the Region participants worked together to create and deliver unified, relevant messages about the value of the 2020 Census (through infographics, videos, digital campaigns, and other media), to secure resources to reach hard-to-count households, and to regularly exchange information and ideas to strengthen local efforts ([final report](#), [Every Voice Counts](#), [here](#)).



VII. Public Sector



In the DC region, local governments created Complete Count Committees to coordinate efforts and create partnerships for Census 2020 engagement. Such committees were formed by the governments of Arlington, VA; Fairfax County, VA; Loudoun County, VA; Prince William County, VA; Montgomery County, MD; Prince George’s County, MD; and the District of Columbia. These committees met regularly to gather resources and information to support their outreach efforts.

Some of the support that those jurisdictions provided included:



Creating video content with messages from elected officials and Census 2020 explanation videos



Developing web pages where information was consolidated and local efforts shared



Translating outreach materials for limited- and non-English speakers



Convening for cross-sector information sharing



Connecting to the U.S. Census Bureau to support its efforts, including sharing links to the Bureau’s resources. The District of Columbia and Montgomery County, MD also provided funding opportunities for local nonprofits with the capacity to conduct outreach to hard-to-count populations in those areas.



While local governments focused on their neighborhoods and communities, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) focused its efforts on the region as a whole. It formed a Census Work Group that was composed of local governments, nonprofit organizations, and foundations.

In June 2019, MWCOG co-organized a regional forum entitled “Interventions that Work: 2020 Census and Hard-to-Reach Communities.” MWCOG issued a certified resolution in support of the U.S. Census Bureau extending its Census 2020 operations, created a video of officials calling on residents to complete the census form, and held virtual conversations with local residents and officials on the 2020 Census.

Overall, the region had an increase in its response rate from 2010. The efforts of community and nonprofit organizations, local governments, and the philanthropic sector contributed to the increases in response rates.

VIII. Lessons from Census 2020



As the data for the 2020 Census continued to be analyzed, CountDMVIn grantee partners and others participated in two convenings (November 2020 and January 2021) to identify barriers they experienced and strategies that worked. The following section includes highlights from the discussions on what worked, the challenges, and recommendations.

What worked

Trusted messengers: Historically, community and nonprofit organizations organize and directly engage with residents to provide various supports for neighborhoods and communities. Through this engagement, nonprofits have built trusted relationships over time. As Census 2020 began, nonprofits leveraged relationships built on trust and long-standing engagements. Community and nonprofit organizations were the only trusted messengers in some communities, especially in Black and immigrant communities. Faith leaders included messages about completing the census. Youth Ambassadors were powerful, engaging, and brought energy and authenticity to the message.

Youth Census Ambassadors should continue to play a major role in the future. A participant shared that their Youth Census Ambassadors brought a lot of energy and technology expertise, and helped develop text banking and social media strategies.

– Nonprofit at CountDMVIn convening, December 2020

Social media: Social media use grew tremendously over the course of Census 2020, and many people cited it as a major factor allowing organizations to get effective messages to hard-to-reach communities in a safe manner.

We were able to develop a step-by-step guide in multiple languages, including Amharic, to completing the census and have that be on social media, where people could access the guides.

– Nonprofit at CountDMVIn convening, July 2020

Microtargeting: CountDMVIn researched response rates by neighborhoods and provided data to groups that work in those neighborhoods and areas. Nonprofit groups were able to focus efforts specifically in those areas with low response rates. With their knowledge of the areas they serve, nonprofits were able to develop specific strategies and messaging for different neighborhoods and demographics.

In addition, our student Census Ambassadors continue to do digital outreach through social media and word of mouth to many of our hard-to-count communities, such as renters, senior citizens, international students, immigrants, and more.

– Nonprofit in response to a CountDMVIn survey, March 2020

Funding support for census-specific outreach: The nonprofits expressed appreciation for funding specifically focused on Census 2020 outreach. As groups were addressing so many different challenges, the funding helped support the work of the Census 2020 without requiring the nonprofits to dip into their general funding. Most of the funding helped support individuals — from paid youth to dedicated staff — who focused their efforts on engaging and reaching out to people in the community.

PHOTO CREDIT: Many Languages One Love (MLOV) Census 2020 Youth Ambassadors





Challenges

Coordination among stakeholders across the region: The breadth of Census 2020 efforts was impressive, covering the entire Washington, DC region. However, some of these efforts felt duplicative to nonprofits. There was coordination among organizations within DC, MD, and VA, but there was less interaction across all three. CountDMVIn hosted some sessions to bring their grantee partners together, and MWCOG coordinated local governments. However, there was not a singular effort to connect various stakeholders throughout the Washington, DC region.

For nonprofit organizations, a coordinated regional effort could have helped in developing outreach materials, particularly in different languages. For example, materials in Amharic or an explanatory video created in one jurisdiction could have been shared with others. In some cases, duplicative materials were created. In 2020, information changed so quickly that keeping up with it was a challenge. It made it difficult to assess pivots in outreach and advocacy efforts. The lack of a centralized space left some of the best practices contained within one jurisdiction, with other areas learning of the effort too late to implement.

Timing for funding and work: This was a perpetual issue for Census 2020 because of its cyclical nature. The momentum really builds as the kick-off date nears. The most recent decennial count provided additional challenges given the uncertainty around the deadline for completing the census forms. Regional momentum began to ramp up in mid-2019, but once the pandemic hit, it shifted the focus for the region and, particularly, for nonprofits. It also paused the development of materials, messaging, and capacity. The short run up to 2020 gave nonprofits six months to prepare before the pandemic put a pause on those efforts. A longer runway could have helped as there would have been more time for planning and developing capacity.

Need for more coordinated and tailored messaging: Nonprofits felt a common theme would have been helpful for the entire region in unifying their efforts. There was also a need to develop messages for different segments of the population. For example, messaging that connected to youth would look different from messaging for seniors.

Language access/justice: Another perpetual issue for Census 2020 was language access, particularly for Asian and African communities. Census 2020 touted a robust language effort, but the implementation fell flat with language support not working when it was needed and materials in different languages not easily available from local jurisdictions. Electronic documents could be downloaded, however, the availability of printed materials was limited. Nonprofit organizations created their own materials in different languages to address this need.

Housing situation: Housing challenges were multi-layered with two major challenges, namely evictions and accessibility. In engaging in mail-drive and pamphlet-based outreach, materials were distributed door-to-door. As the pandemic affected the economy, families faced evictions and reaching those families was nearly impossible. Organizations supporting those individuals and families incorporated Census 2020 outreach in their eviction support services. The other challenge was getting into buildings to distribute materials, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

IX. 2030: Integrated Communications Campaign Strategy



Preparing for 2030 a decade ahead of time can feel daunting and disconnected. However, community organizations feel this is important for a successful 2030 Census.

One asset that may help is an archive of more than 120 census materials from many of the organizations working in 2020. These include communications materials, videos, photos, mailing lists, social media items, training materials and more. This archive is housed at the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers and can be accessed at bit.ly/DMVCensusArchive.

The following are recommendations from community and nonprofit organizations.

Earlier start

Many groups suggested that one year out before the census was not enough time to build up momentum, and funding and engagement efforts should start three to five years out with more significant engagement as the date approaches. A good starting place would be looking at Census 2020 campaign materials that are archived at WRAG.



Greater coordination

It would help to have more coordination and transparency between the Census Bureau and other jurisdictions, which could include access to real-time data that would directly inform planning efforts. A coordinated and organized infrastructure will be needed to identify best practices and improve the effectiveness of communications.



Better data

We need better data on how an undercount impacts federal funding for state and local governments. Localities need to determine what the financial impact would be for their communities. Data was available by locale, but many groups participated in identity-based outreach. Having geographical population data available would help focused outreach and engagement.

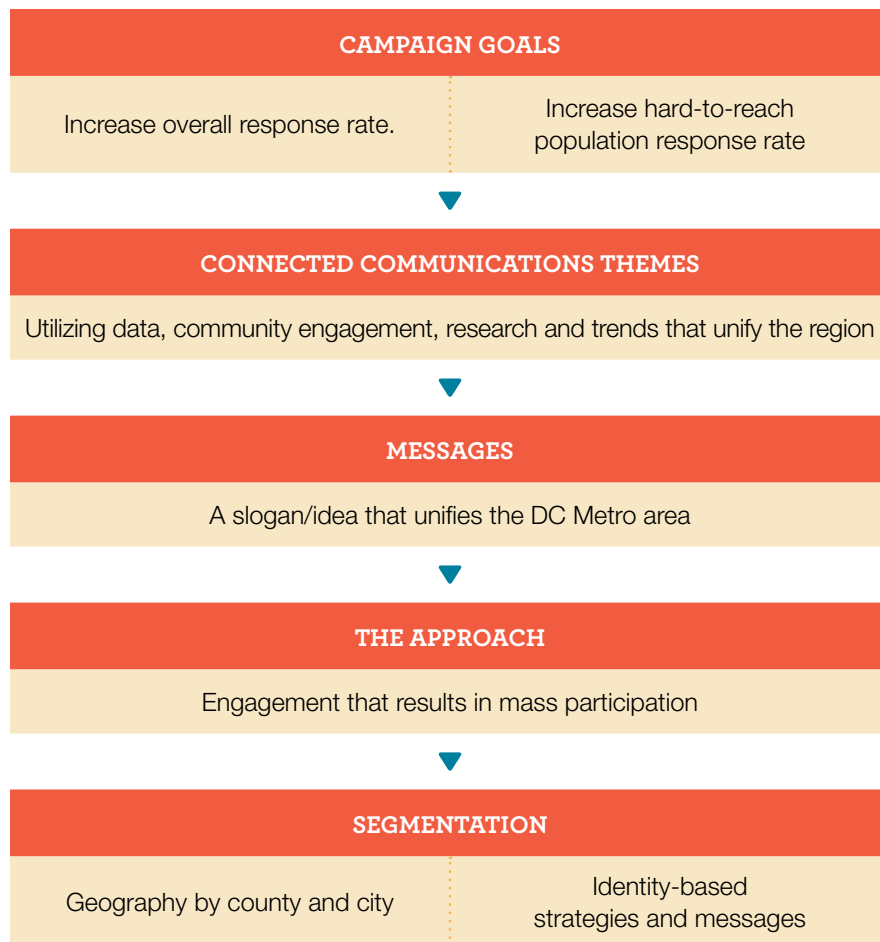


Leverage existing efforts

Not only was the census occurring in 2020, but the election was heating up, and with that comes opportunity. While the impact of the census on people's lives may be hard to explain, voting is much more salient for residents who are engaged in civic action.



This past year proved the need and impact of a concerted effort in achieving a complete and accurate census count. An integrated communications campaign that is data-driven, multidimensional, and multi-year, combined with community organizing and informed strategies, is being recommended. We believe this approach would increase the response rate in 2030. The architecture of this approach is outlined below.



In the planning process, some important components to consider include:

- **Overarching challenges:** These are challenges that had an impact on the census during 2020, 2010, and even 2000, such as mistrust in government and concerns about data privacy.
- **Community centered:** Keeping the effort centered in the community is important to success, not only for buy-in, but also for expertise and strategic guidance.
- **The media landscape:** Exploring and maintaining updates through media will be critical for message delivery. In 2020, social media was a primary tool; it is unknown what the media landscape will be in 2030.
- **Responsive support:** Each census has posed a unique challenge. There needs to be funding that is allocated to support the main effort and respond to the changes that occur in the course of the census time frame.

X. Conclusion



Census 2020 would have been a massive effort even without the complications of a global pandemic, a racial justice reckoning, and a national election season.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the thousands of people who cajoled, texted, called, knocked on doors, petitioned policymakers, appeared at events, designed communications campaigns, and otherwise gave all of their expertise to this important effort. Our region will benefit every day, for the next ten years, from their work. We thank them and say, 2030 will come sooner than we think.

Appendices



Foundations That Engaged in DMV Grantmaking and Beyond Grantmaking Activities

- ACT for Alexandria
- Bainum Family Foundation
- Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
- CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield
- Community Foundation for Northern Virginia
- Consumer Health Foundation
- Crimsonbridge Foundation
- Greater Washington Community Foundation
- Institute for Wise Philanthropy
- Meyer Foundation
- Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund
- Northern Virginia Health Foundation
- Potomac Health Foundation
- United Way of the National Capital Area
- Washington Area Women's Foundation
- Weissberg Foundation

Organizations that Engaged in Census Work

- Arc of the District of Columbia
- Asian American LEAD
- Ayuda
- Black Swan Academy for Mutual Aid Group in Wards 7 and 8
- CASA
- Community Foundation of Northern Virginia
- Community of Hope
- DC Action for Children
- District of Columbia Baptist Convention
- Edu-Futuro
- Ethiopian Community Center
- Greater Washington Urban League
- Identity
- Justice for Muslims Collective
- La Clinica del Pueblo
- Latin American Youth Center
- Latino Economic Development Corporation
- Legal Aid Justice Center
- Liberty's Promise
- Life After Release Mutual Aid Group in Prince George's County
- Many Languages One Voice Mutual Aid Group in Wards 1 and 4
- Mary's Center
- Montgomery College Foundation
- National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
- Prince George's Child Resource Center
- Progressive Maryland
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers DC
- Seabury Resources for Aging
- Tenants & Workers United
- United Planning Organization
- Virginia Civic Engagement Table
- Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights
- Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community and Engagement

(all names based on available information)

Appendices



Conveners and Organizers that Engaged in Census Work

*Organizers of the June 2019 Convening,
“Interventions that Work: 2020 Census
and Hard-to-Reach Communities”*

- The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
- CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield
- The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia
- Consumer Health Foundation
- George Washington University Milken Institute
School of Public Health
- Institute for Wise Philanthropy
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- Meyer Foundation
- Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund
- Northern Virginia Health Foundation
- Regional Primary Care Coalition
- United Way of the National Capital Area
- Washington Area Women’s Foundation
- Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers
- Weissberg Foundation

*Organizers of the January 2021 Convening,
“Census 2020: What Worked, What Didn’t
and Looking Ahead”*

- CASA
- Community Foundation
for Northern Virginia
- National Korean American
Service and Education Consortium
- Prince George’s County Child Resource Center
- United Planning Organization
- Bainum Family Foundation
- Consumer Health Foundation
- Meyer Foundation
- United Way of the National Capital Area
- Washington Regional Association
of Grantmakers

(all names based on available information)

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