The 2020 Census will have far-reaching impacts on political representation and government funding: ensuring a complete and accurate count is crucial. But the Census Bureau faces significant challenges as it encourages U.S. residents, for the first time, to respond to the questionnaire online. Those challenges include limited public Internet access, limited public awareness about the value of the Census, and lack of skills or comfort using online applications.

America’s libraries are ideal partners to help address these challenges. Libraries are trusted institutions and experienced collaborators—providing information, technology, and training resources to enable Americans to connect with government for many purposes. With a convenient presence in communities across the country, from inner-city neighborhoods to remote tribal lands, libraries can help Census stakeholders reach the full range of audiences. State and local policymakers, the Census Bureau, Congress, foundations, and other stakeholders should partner with libraries as they work to ensure a successful 2020 Census.

Libraries are essential, trusted partners in achieving a complete and accurate count in the 2020 Census. Libraries:

- **Deliver information** about the Census and host community outreach activities.
- **Provide internet access** and assist respondents with completing the Census form online.
- **Serve as trusted messengers**, including in hard-to-count communities.
- **Provide access to statistical data** from Census products for businesses and community members.

**Partners for Civic Success**

Libraries often work with government partners to achieve community priorities. Library staff connect people with the information they need to access government services and benefits, complete online forms, and engage with civic issues. For instance,
place-based partnerships help people apply for veterans’ benefits, complete tax forms, understand health insurance options, and prepare to become U.S. citizens. By leveraging libraries’ assets as community infrastructure, partners can extend their reach with only modest incremental costs.

Libraries are well positioned to similarly serve as partners for the 2020 Census, a role that many have played in previous counts. In the 2010 Census, libraries hosted more than 6,000 official Census Bureau outreach sites. Additionally, many libraries hosted community-organized outreach activities, such as an event organized by Asian-American community organizations in the New York Public Library’s Chatham Square branch, located in Chinatown.

With nearly 17,000 physical locations, public libraries can facilitate the work of Census stakeholders. For instance, the Grand Island (NE) Public Library hosted a 2020 Census planning meeting for local government leaders with the Census Bureau and the Nebraska State Data Center. In Rhode Island, the Pawtucket Public Library and several others hosted Census Bureau recruitment events for workers in the 2018 Census test. As the Census Bureau expects to hire and train more than 500,000 temporary workers for the 2020 Census, libraries across the country will provide cost-effective and flexible workspaces. Diverse potential workers can apply online and receive needed online job training to support census efforts.

**Connecting America to the First Online Census**

More than 24 million Americans do not have high-speed internet at home, according to the Federal Communications Commission. Older adults, rural residents, racial minorities, and those with lower levels of education and income are less likely to have home broadband. America’s libraries are the leading source of no-fee public access to the internet, wi-fi, computers and other devices and technology training.

With the response to the 2020 Census designed to take place primarily online, libraries can bridge the digital divide and support a more complete count. For instance, during the census test in Rhode Island, Providence Community Library branches dedicated computers for Census respondents to use and raised awareness of the survey.

**Reaching Hard-to-Count Communities**

Providing accurate information that is relevant to different users’ needs is a central mission of libraries. Libraries have daily experience providing information to diverse groups of people, including communities that are considered hard to count in the Census. Libraries can leverage this experience and wide community engagement to serve as trusted messengers of information about participating in the 2020 Census.

Libraries have an extensive geographic presence in the communities that are at greatest risk of being undercounted in 2020. According to recent City University of New York analysis, a public library is located within five miles of 99% of the hard-to-count Census tracts identified with the lowest response rates in 2010—and 79% of the time, a library is within a single mile.
Libraries serve people of all ages and backgrounds, and are well-positioned to reach some demographic groups that are at heightened risk of being undercounted in the Census. Children younger than 5 years old, for instance, are the most undercounted age group. The Annie E. Casey Foundation recommends libraries as a trusted messenger of information about Census participation to parents and guardians.

American Indians and Alaska Natives also are historically undercounted. Tribal leaders consulted by the Census Bureau recommended libraries as a communication channel to provide information about the Census to tribal citizens.

Through partnerships with Complete Count Committees and other community efforts, libraries can deliver information about the importance of Census participation, options for responding, confidentiality and data security, and other topics critical to enabling full and inclusive Census participation in every community.

Using Census Data to Inform Communities

Libraries’ involvement with the Census and Census data will continue well after 2020. As information experts, library staff provide access to statistical information compiled by the Census Bureau. Libraries work with businesses, government agencies, community organizations and research groups in finding Census data to better understand their communities. For example:

The Chelsea (MI) District Library offered a three-part course on census data covering topics including how this data can be used to research markets for business, support causes, and even locate workers.

Librarians from Rutgers University in Newark (NJ) deliver workshops for the Small Business Development Center to teach entrepreneurs about using Census data for market research and business planning.

The Hannibal (MO) Free Public Library partnered with the city finance department to utilize Census data in the city’s efforts to encourage investment on the South Side of Hannibal.

The University of California, Berkeley, Libraries provided a workshop and developed an online guide for Contra Costa County’s Children & Families Commission to assist the commission in using Census data when updating its strategic plan.

The Palm Beach County (FL) Library System provided Census data about grandparents raising grandchildren to a local non-profit organization, Families First of Palm Beach County, which the non-profit used in a successful grant application.

The Drexel University Libraries in Philadelphia (PA) partner with the university’s School of Public Health to train graduate students on how to use Census data as part of community health assessments.

TAKEAWAYS FOR DECISION MAKERS

America’s libraries are well-positioned to meet the challenges of the 2020 Census and help ensure a complete and accurate count. Decision makers should:

- Invite local libraries to participate on Complete Count Committees and related activities
- Partner with libraries to assist local residents in applying and training for Census jobs
- Host community meetings and outreach activities in libraries
- Provide resources so libraries can meet technology needs for online Census response
- Support library services that provide access to Census data
The 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E’s of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America’s cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services, with more than 57,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

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