

The 2020 Census:

DIGITAL PREPAREDNESS PLAYBOOK

A PLAYBOOK PRODUCED BY

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Working alongside experts and students, the Beeck Center surfaces, accelerates, and scales promising social impact efforts driving institutional-level change. Partnering with Georgetown University, the Center is positioned as a neutral, academic player, and has built credibility working across sectors to generate new ideas provoking leaders to think and act differently. The Center always operates with a student lens to help educate and prepare future leaders in the impact space through experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The National League of Cities and the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University collaborated on this playbook as a way to aid local governments in their preparation for the 2020 Digital Census. Beeck Center Fellow Kyla Fullenwider and Student Analyst Katie Sullivan led the efforts, connecting with U.S. Census Bureau officials, city leaders, technical experts, and other stakeholders to craft this critical document. Fullenwider is a Beeck Center Fellow leading our work around the digital implications of the 2020 Census, specifically, what local governments, journalists, leading digital platforms, and the public can do to prepare and participate in this crucial function of our democracy. She previously served as the first Chief Innovation Officer of the U.S. Census Bureau. Sullivan is a Beeck Center Student Analyst, currently pursuing a Masters in Global Human Development at Georgetown University.



ABOUT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the nation's leading advocacy organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. Through its membership and partnerships with state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for more than 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. NLC's Center for City Solutions provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities and creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities.

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ADDITIONAL PARTNERS:





Introduction

Welcome

In 2020, for the first time, millions of U.S. residents can respond online to the census, hundreds of thousands of federal workers will use handheld devices to conduct the decennial count, and news about the census will travel through social media channels in real time. Our nation's first "digital" census presents myriad opportunities for a truly participatory count, but a number of issues—some old and some new—may create obstacles toward a complete and accurate count.

As our country gears up to embark on a national modernization of America's largest non-wartime effort, new strategies and tactics are needed to navigate our digital world. And with trust in federal government at historic lows, local governments and cities, towns, and villages have a critical role to play in the 2020 Census.

Kyla Fullenwider

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CENSUS

CONSERVATION

I. Digital Preparedness

While some intractable problems persist, such as increasingly diverse and mobile “hard to count” populations, this guide will focus on a number of new threats and how to address them. For the first time, new considerations such as the first online form, misinformation and disinformation campaigns, data and security concerns, and digital access and literacy are all issues that cities will need to address with their constituents.

Cities will be on the front lines of helping to ensure a complete count of their constituents. However, many communities are unprepared. This playbook, while by no means exhaustive, will provide a framework for city leaders to understand the challenges ahead and the ways in which cities can uniquely impact their own counts. City leaders understand that an inaccurate census leads to underrepresentation and fewer dollars for the most vulnerable populations and communities. If we don't get the census right, there is so much we are at risk of getting wrong—the implications of which will last for at least a decade.

FAQ

AS THE CENSUS GOES ONLINE FOR THE FIRST TIME, YOUR CONSTITUENTS MAY HAVE QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS. SOME OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE INCLUDED HERE. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE LISTED BELOW.

A. Internet Self-Response FAQ

WHEN DOES ONLINE RESPONSE BEGIN?

Online response will go live in mid-March as the first wave of census invitations to respond go out. They will be available through the end of April/beginning of May (exact dates are not released). All households will receive multiple mailings from the Census Bureau reminding them to respond, and if they do not respond, door-to-door enumeration—individual counts conducted by Census workers— will begin.

WHEN WILL INDIVIDUALS RECEIVE NOTIFICATIONS FOR RESPONDING ONLINE?

For the majority of the country (excluding group quarters, homeless, and few types of enumeration areas (TEAs)), households will receive a postcard beginning in mid-to-late March that instructs them to respond online, by phone, or by requesting a traditional paper mailout. There will be two reminders if households have not responded, followed by a paper form. Finally, if no self-response is gathered, the Census Bureau will send enumerators to the door.

IS IT BETTER TO RESPOND ONLINE?

It is best to respond however the household feels most comfortable. If residents do respond online during the response period, they will receive fewer mailings and are less likely to have a census enumerator come to their household. Furthermore, research has shown that some communities may feel more comfortable responding using a paper form, so it is important that constituents know there are a number of options for responding.

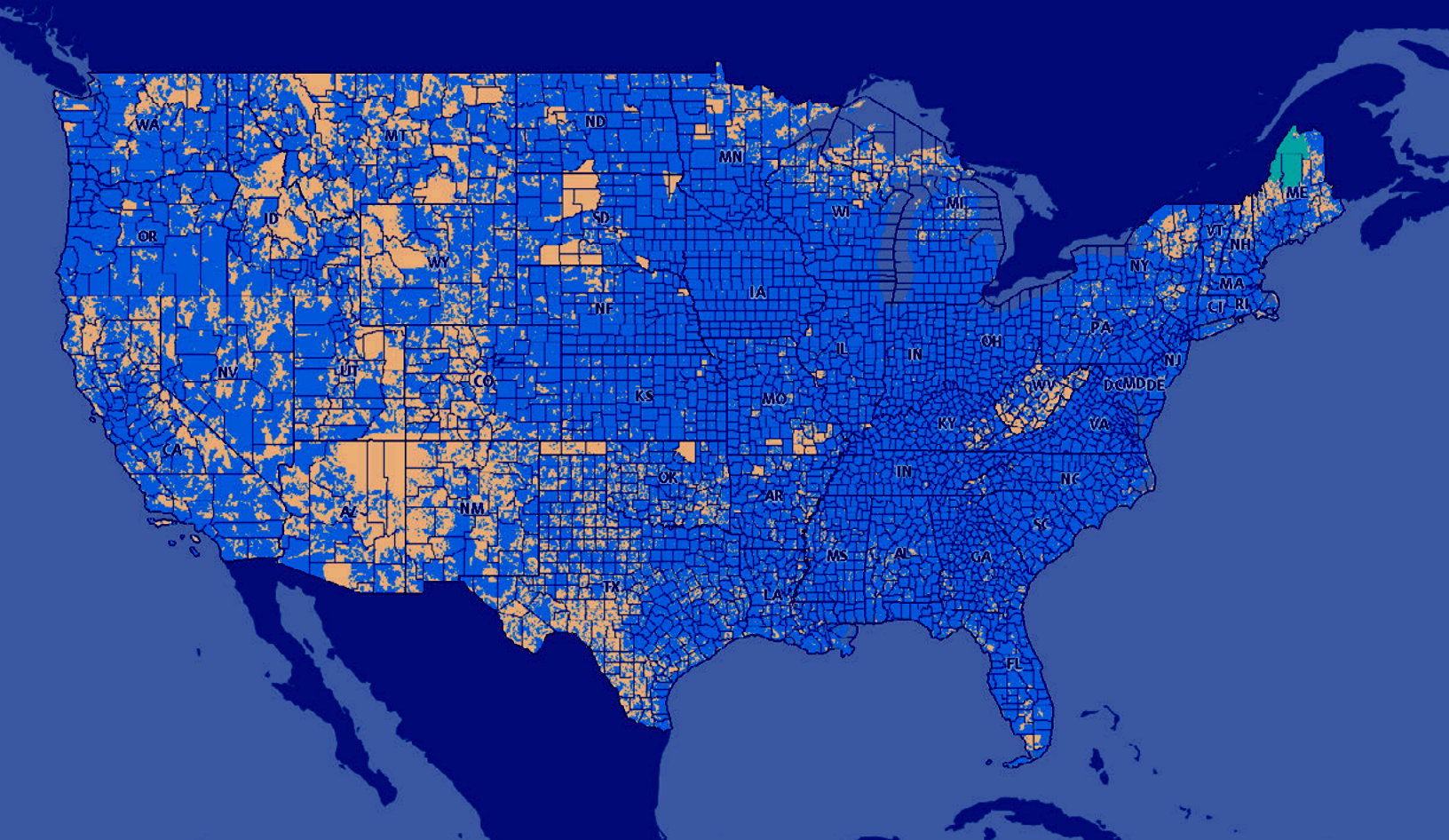
DO YOU NEED IDENTIFICATION TO RESPOND?

Each household is given a unique ID in the mail they receive, but if an individual does not have this ID when filling out their census, *they are still able to respond.*

SOME AREAS WITH LOW BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH THE ONLINE FORM. WHICH HOUSEHOLDS GET THE PAPER FORM AT THE OUTSET?

Please follow [this link](#) to see your type of enumeration area to determine if your area will receive a paper form.

RESOURCE!



2020 Census: Type of Enumeration Area (TEA) Viewer.

Source: [Census Bureau Type of Enumeration Area \(TEA\) Viewer](#)

WILL THE INTERNET SELF RESPONSE (ISR) AND MOBILE DESIGN BE AVAILABLE FOR VIEWING/TESTING BEFORE RELEASE?

Online response will go live in mid-March as the first wave of census invitations to respond go out. They will be available through the end of April/beginning of May (exact dates are not released). All households will receive multiple mailings from the Census Bureau reminding them to respond, and if they do not respond, door-to-door enumeration—individual counts conducted by Census workers— will begin.

WHAT ARE THE BEST RESOURCES/ POINTS OF CONTACT ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE ONLINE FORM?

As households receive their census, phone and email help information will be included for any troubles that may occur with the online form.

WHAT LANGUAGES ARE INCLUDED IN THE ONLINE FORM?

Spanish Haitian CREOLE Bengali
ROMANIAN Tamil Tigrinya IGBO CHINESE
Portuguese Greek Telugu Navajo IIOCANO
Marathi Vietnamese Japanese Amharic
Burmese Hungarian Dutch Sinhala Korean Italian
Somali Punjabi Hebrew Croatian Slovak
Russian Farsi Thai Lao Malayalam
Bulgarian Arabic German Gjurati Hmong Swahili
TWI TAGALOG ARMENIAN Khmer
ALBANIAN Yiddish LITHUANIAN Polish
HINDI Nepali TURKISH Indonesia Yoruba
French Ukrainian Urdu Bosnian Serbian Czech



B. Cybersecurity FAQ

ADAPTED FROM THE CENSUS COUNTS CYBER SECURITY BEST PRACTICES. FOR MORE INFORMATION, [CLICK HERE](#).

RESOURCE!

WHAT SECURITY MEASURES DOES THE CENSUS BUREAU HAVE IN PLACE TO PROTECT HOUSEHOLD RESPONSES?

The Census Bureau is employing a number of commonly used security measures including encrypting the data it collects and requiring two-factor authentication on enumerator devices and encryption to authenticate the identity of the census workers.

↕ **Two-factor Authentication:** Authentication is the process of verifying the identity or other attributes of an entity (user, process, or device) ([NICCS](#)).

The Census Bureau is employing a two-factor authentication, or two step process, for enumerator devices. This means, for example, that there will be a passcode and fingerprint ID required to access each enumerator device.

🔒 **Encryption:** Converting data into a form that cannot be easily understood by unauthorized people; the Census Bureau will use both encryption in transit and encryption at rest for census responses ([NICCS](#)).

For online census responses, the Census Bureau will encrypt response data twice. The first encryption occurs when you hit the submit button. The second set of encryption happens when the responses reach the Bureau.

WHAT SYSTEM THREATS IS THE CENSUS BUREAU MONITORING FOR?

The Census Bureau is monitoring for a number of threats including service denials, irregular system flows, and phishing and disinformation.

✖ **Denial of Service:** An attack that prevents or impairs the authorized use of information system resources or services. ([NICCS](#)) If you've ever had trouble accessing a website and came across a message like "error 403: access denied" or "you don't have permission to access [website]," then you have come across a denial of service.

↔ **Irregular System Flows:** The Census Bureau is monitoring for irregular system flows, i.e. web traffic that is unexpected or outside of normal levels. Not much detail will be released about system flows, as releasing that information is a security risk in and of itself.

👤 **Phishing:** A digital form of social engineering to deceive individuals into providing sensitive information. ([NICCS](#)). Often phishing attempts aim to acquire usernames and passwords to facilitate access to secured systems. In other instances, they aim to manipulate a target into running malware.

RESOURCE!

HOW CAN WE ASSURE OUR CONSTITUENTS THAT THEIR DATA IS SAFE? WHAT IS DIFFERENTIAL PRIVACY?

Census employees are sworn to [Title 13](#), which protects any data from being shared. The disclosure avoidance technique the Census Bureau will use protects individual responses from being re-identified. More detailed information can be found on the Census Bureau blogs. For more information on both of these topics, see the “Data Privacy” section of the playbook.

WILL THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS), OR OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES OUTSIDE OF THE CENSUS BUREAU, HAVE ACCESS TO INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE DATA IN THE EVENT OF A DATA BREACH?

Although DHS and other security experts are helping with the Census Bureau, in the event of a data breach, they will only have access to IP addresses and limited metadata.

WHAT ARE THE BEST BROWSERS TO USE WHEN RESPONDING ONLINE?

The best options for responding online will be to use the latest version of Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome, or Firefox. The Census Bureau is testing the Internet Self Response (ISR) in the current and prior year versions of these browsers.

WHAT DEVICES ARE BEST FOR RESPONDING ONLINE?

Desktop PCs, iPhone versions 5 and later, most iPad versions, and Samsung Galaxy phones and tablets.

IF WE DO HAVE KIOSKS OR OTHER DIGITAL ACCESS POINTS, WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR SECURING KIOSKS?

The Census Counts campaign has a comprehensive guide on best practices for securing kiosks, which you can find [here](#).





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II. Misinformation & Disinformation

Identifying Census Disinformation

The lead-up to the census has produced large quantities of information and commentary about the upcoming count, which are circulating via news channels, social media, and other networks. However, not all available information on the 2020 Census is factual. Given the sheer volume of information that is created and shared each day, spotting inaccurate information can pose an ongoing challenge. Based on the work of the research institute [Data & Society](#), below is an outline of simple strategies your city can follow to identify and mitigate information threats. Furthermore, while these skills are critical for the census, they will also serve city leadership well in a multitude of situations, ranging from emergency response to elections.

What is Disinformation and Why Does It Matter?

Obtaining a fair, representative, and accurate 2020 Census count is vitally important. Political representation, access to funding, and distribution of public resources in your city all depend on your constituents' decision to fill out the census. Minimizing disinformation helps to create a society in which everyone counts.

Your constituents make decisions based on information from a variety of sources. While census information shared through government channels is likely to be verified, constituents will receive and trust information from other sources such as friends, family members, or social media accounts. This information may be partially or entirely fabricated depending on the biases, fears, beliefs, and motives of the

person who shared it. Two types of factually inaccurate content exist. The first, **misinformation**, refers to false claims spread by individuals or organizations with good intentions who believe those claims to be true. For example, if an ill-informed individual shared with her Twitter followers that the 2020 Census could only be filled out online, this would be considered misinformation. The second type, **disinformation**, refers to false claims spread intentionally to cause harm. In the case of the census, bad actors may spread disinformation with the objective of suppressing participation in, or otherwise manipulating behavior around, the decennial count. Disinformation may be created as propaganda, to push a political agenda, or as part of a scam. For example, if a Twitter account mimicked the branding of a legitimate news outlet to spread false information and deceive readers, this would be considered disinformation. Disinformation may be part of a **disinformation campaign**, or a coordinated effort between multiple actors to influence people through false or misleading content. Both misinformation and disinformation may inhibit census participation if not checked, though it is hard to know in advance how much of a role this will play in 2020. This resource will focus primarily on disinformation, as it is more difficult to stop.

What Does Disinformation Look Like?

While disinformation can take many forms, in the case of the census, any content, hashtags, images, or videos that may suppress census participation should be investigated further for signs of manipulative or

inauthentic behavior. For example, if a community of Twitter users in your city begin tweeting about a census boycott using a specific hashtag, you may wish to use the techniques in this guide to explore the origins of the hashtag to assess whether a coordinated disinformation campaign may be behind it. In addition, while not always signs of disinformation, traits like heavy bias, lack of professionalism, poor writing, overly emotional language, mimicry of legitimate news sources, and embellishment may indicate that an article or post is worth further exploration for signs of disinformation.

In addition, bad actors may edit photos and videos or use them out of context to support a disinformation agenda. Since photos are easy to edit, always question images that purport to show controversial or potentially incendiary content. Bots, or computer programs designed to auto-generate and interact with social media posts, may also be used to spread disinformation and fabricate the appearance of support for a viewpoint or agenda. Remember: disinformation is not be limited to public online channels — it may be spread through closed networks (such as private WhatsApp or Facebook messaging groups), real-world communities (such as social or religious groups that meet in person), or through traditional media channels.

While separating disinformation from factual sources can be challenging, there are steps your city can take to prevent, prepare for, and respond to disinformation and keep it from gaining traction.

What Can My City Do?

Prevention

It's difficult to know if, where, and when disinformation will appear. However, there are proactive steps your city can take to identify potential sources of disinformation and create an atmosphere that counters disinformation from spreading.

MONITORING

Ask partners and collaborators to regularly share the details of websites, social media accounts, or other sources that are suspected of spreading false information around the census. Keep tabs on the veracity of information that these actors are spreading. Technologies like [Hootsuite](#) and [Google Alerts](#) can be used to easily track local mentions of the census and monitor potentially problematic hashtags on social media. If disinformation is discovered but online traction and engagement is low, avoid responding so that you do not inadvertently spread the disinformation further.

IDENTIFY ADVERSARIAL AMPLIFIERS AND TRUSTED MESSENGERS

Identify key actors and organizations that are likely to amplify disinformation and monitor them closely including social media accounts with outsized influence. Similarly, identify actors and organizations that your constituents trust and build working relationships with them. Raise awareness about disinformation among these trusted messengers so that they can be mobilized to counter a future disinformation campaign.

FILL DATA VOIDS

Ensure that correct and accurate census information is available and easily searchable for constituents.

In cases where little factual content exists on the internet, bad actors may co-opt common search terms so that disinformation rises to the top of search queries. Moreover, since the census only happens once per decade, "census" itself is a data void, as relatively little legitimate online content has been created for the census. As a result, false or misleading census content rises to the top of search results more quickly. To combat this, put all of your city's census content online and optimize your content for search engine discovery in response to census queries. Coordinate messaging with local partners and stakeholders to ensure messaging is clear and not conflicting. The larger and more accessible your repository of factual content, the harder it will be for disinformation agents and media manipulators to find a data void to exploit.

UNDERSTAND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM POLICIES ON DISINFORMATION

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms have policies that govern what constitutes disinformation and how the platform will react to it. Locate and read these policies for platforms you use regularly and review how to flag or report disinformation and misleading accounts on each platform. Disinformation policies and reporting guidelines for major social media platforms are included in the Additional Resources section.

Preparation

Consider the steps that your city will follow if a disinformation campaign arises. Being prepared helps you to act appropriately and decisively if a problematic narrative begins to spread.

CREATE INOCULATION MESSAGES

Develop messaging that “inoculates” your constituents against believing disinformation. Inoculation messaging primes your audience to be on the lookout for false claims by explaining why bad actors may be spreading disinformation while simultaneously repeating and amplifying the truth

MINIMIZE AMPLIFICATION OF DISINFORMATION

Calling attention to false narratives, even in an effort to denounce them, may inadvertently spread the disinformation further. If online traction and engagement is low, nonresponse to disinformation is usually the best policy. If a response is required, limiting refutation of disinformation to the original channels used to promote it helps to keep the false narrative contained.

Practice Rapid Response



Anticipating possible disinformation scenarios that may arise and considering how your city might respond to them will help ensure coordinated, rapid action should disinformation emerge.

To Refute or Not to Refute?

Paradoxically, responding to disinformation, even to refute it, can give the disinformation oxygen and allow it to spread and flourish. If few people have seen the disinformation in the first place, publishing a public refutation may actually amplify the disinformation to a wider audience. In cases where the original audience is small and the false information is not spreading or jumping to new channels, it is best to ignore disinformation and not respond or refute it.

In cases where the number of people exposed to the disinformation is beginning to grow, it may make sense to refute the disinformation in a restrained, limited fashion. For example, let's say that a problematic narrative is circulating through a popular closed Whatsapp group chat. Members of the chat have seen the disinformation, but it has not yet spread to public social media platforms. However, you are concerned that group members are forwarding the disinformation via private messages to family and friends who are likely to believe and act on it. In this case, you could have a trusted messenger directly refute the disinformation within the Whatsapp group. However, it would be inadvisable to publish a broad response to the disinformation on other platforms, because in doing so, you could inadvertently amplify the disinformation among populations who have not yet encountered it.

It is often challenging to recognize the "tipping point" that determines whether or not a response is warranted. To do so, you may ask the following questions to estimate whether the narrative is spreading:

- ☑ Has the problematic content shifted from insular, discrete communities to a wider audience?
- ☑ Has the disinformation jumped from one platform to another?
- ☑ Has online engagement with the problematic post or narrative surpassed a specific threshold (for example, has social media interaction reached four digits)?
- ☑ Has the disinformation reached or been spread by influential amplifiers?

If you answered "yes" to several of the above questions, you might consider whether it makes sense to refute the disinformation in a restrained fashion. However, ultimately your city should carefully consider the potential positive and negative effects of refuting a particular problematic narrative. Ensure that the pros outweigh the cons before issuing a response.

What Would We Do If...?

To date, it is uncertain whether disinformation will pose a major threat to the 2020 Census. However, it is a good idea for cities to plan ahead and consider how they would respond to different types of disinformation threats before disinformation becomes a problem. This will help ensure that your staff keeps calm and acts in a coordinated and strategic manner if a threat emerges. Remember, sometimes the best response is no response at all.

How would you react to the following scenarios? What other scenarios may occur in your city that you should prepare for?

- News is circulating that census enumerator devices have been hacked. Reporters remark that they have seen data that looks like census data and the Commerce Department says that it is investigating. This may be a hoax or it may be real. Your community is beginning to panic. What do you do?
- A photo is circulating on WeChat in your city depicting an Asian man in handcuffs at his front door with an ICE officer, with a message in Mandarin saying “Don’t answer the door. It’s ICE, not the Census Bureau.” What do you do?
- While reading through your city’s main daily newspaper, you notice that a major news story was published this morning discussing the likelihood of a hacker gaining access to the U.S. Census Bureau database. While the facts presented in the story are correct, the narrative seems to substantially overstate the likelihood that a breach will occur. Later that day, you see the same article being shared multiple times on Facebook with concerned comments. What do you do?

Source: Data & Society

Response

When disinformation emerges, city governments are often a first point of contact for constituents. Responding appropriately and decisively to disinformation is vital to containing the threat.

VERIFY VERACITY OF PROBLEMATIC INFORMATION

Determine whether suspected disinformation is factual or not. Keep in mind that even content with factual origins may be misrepresented or altered to promote a false narrative. The techniques in the Tools and Resources box can assist you in determining the veracity of problematic content.

IDENTIFY DISINFORMATION TECHNIQUES

Identify whether a specific disinformation technique is in use. While media manipulators are creative and resourceful, their tactics may follow recognizable patterns. Identification of these patterns can help your city predict how the false narrative will spread and you can craft an appropriate response.

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION AND IMPLEMENT RESPONSE

Using the threat classification framework that your city developed, determine the severity of the disinformation threat and decide upon an appropriate response.



SOCKPUPPETRY

This technique involves either human or bot “sock puppets” pretending to be something they are not online.

For example: A social media bot may falsely pose as a local immigrant rights activist and post content discouraging census participation in immigrant populations.

Possible response: Use the tools and resources below to assess whether the account is real. If not, report the fake account to the relevant social media platform for removal.

KEYWORD SQUATTING

This technique involves media manipulators filling data voids with false or misleading content designed to be keyword searchable and rise to the top of search engine results.

For example: Taking advantage of a lack of census content on the internet, a bad actor generates a large quantity of misleading content full of census keywords so that search engines return the misleading articles when someone searches “Census 2020”.

Possible response: Creation of genuine census content to fill data voids and search engine optimization to ensure that search engines return accurate content.

CONTROLLED OPPOSITION

This technique involves sock puppets (either bot or human) seeking to disrupt a particular online community by posing as community members and spreading false narratives.

For example: A bad actor posing as a renter may spread false rumors in an online affordable housing forum that accurately filling out the census can lead to eviction.

Possible response: Use the tools and resources below to assess whether the account is real. If not, report the fake account to the forum administrators for removal.

Tools and Resources

DETECT EDITED IMAGES

MEDIA MANIPULATORS MAY EDIT PHOTOS OR VIDEOS IN MISLEADING WAYS OR MAY USE IMAGES OUT OF CONTEXT TO PROMOTE A FALSE NARRATIVE.

Google reverse image search

allows you to search the internet for similar images and detect whether media manipulators have edited an existing image to support their narrative.

FotoForensics is a tool that analyzes images for signs of manipulation by editing software.

InVID is a browser plug-in that detects traces of video editing and finds original web sources for videos.

SurfSafe is a browser extension for Google Chrome, Firefox, and Opera that identifies original image sources.

IDENTIFY BOTS AND FAKE ACCOUNTS

BOTS AND FAKE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ARE USED TO PROMOTE FALSE NARRATIVES AND GRANT THE ILLUSION OF CREDIBILITY TO A DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN. WHILE THE BELOW METHODS CAN HELP TO IDENTIFY FAKE ACCOUNTS, THEY ARE NOT FOOLPROOF. HOWEVER, IF AN ACCOUNT IS FLAGGED BY SEVERAL BOT DETECTION TOOLS, IT MAY INDICATE POSSIBLE SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY THAT SHOULD BE EVALUATED FURTHER.

Look at social media platform metadata to assess whether a problematic account is a bot. For example, you can easily download Twitter records in spreadsheet format to check for rapid successions of tweets from different locations, which is one sign of possible bot activity. For more information on how to read social media metadata, view this [infographic](#) from Data & Society.

CLICK LINK!

Search for the **same username** on other social media platforms to assess whether the account appears to be a real person. You can also search the **timestamps of posts** to help verify whether the account is a bot, as any human user will take regular breaks from posting (to sleep, for example).

Search for the account using the [WAYBACK MACHINE](#), an internet archive that stores historical snapshots of websites, to see if an **account's followers** have grown at a normal rate over time.

[BOTCHECK.ME](#) is a browser plug-in that rates each Twitter user profile with how confident it is that the user is a bot account. Download [here](#).

[BOTOMETER](#) is a web tool that uses Twitter activity history to estimate the likelihood that an account is a bot. Access the tool [here](#).

TRACK PROBLEMATIC NARRATIVES

SET UP ALERTS SO THAT YOU RECEIVE EARLY NOTIFICATION WHEN DISINFORMATION EMERGES.

Set **Google alerts** for census keywords in your city to receive a daily email digest summarizing the keywords' use in online media. This tactic can be a useful way to monitor for problematic news items. Follow [these steps](#) to set up a Google alert. Potential alert keywords may include "census", "<city name> + census", "census + immigrant", or specific keywords or hashtags linked to problematic narratives you have observed.

CLICK LINK!

Use **Hootsuite** or similar social media management tools to follow the conversation around hashtags related to the 2020 Census and identify upticks in usage of problematic hashtags.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The YALLA COUNT ME IN campaign at the Arab American Institute has developed a wealth of shareable educational [resources](#) on census disinformation.

CLICK LINK!

FIRST DRAFT NEWS has developed an informative [series of training videos](#) on topics ranging from information verification to identifying photo manipulation and using Google Reverse Image Search.

CLICK LINK!

The Leadership Conference's CENSUS COUNTS CAMPAIGN has released a [GOTC toolkit](#) containing helpful resources on how to manage disinformation threats.

CLICK LINK!

The Census Bureau maintains a "RUMORS" [webpage](#) that tracks false information circulating around the census and sets the record straight.

CLICK LINK!

COLOR OF CHANGE maintains a [portal](#) where people can report false census rumors they encounter.

NALEO maintains a toll-free, bilingual [census hotline](#) (877-EL-CENSO or 877-352-3676) to provide free census information that is geared toward Latinx communities but is available to everyone.

HOTLINE

For an in-depth exploration of how to use social media metadata to identify media manipulators, read Dr. Amelia Acker's report: [Data Craft: The Manipulation of Social Media Metadata](#), published by Data & Society.

CLICK LINK!

III. Digital Divide & Access

In 2020, for the first time in the history of the U.S. census, respondents will be able to fill out their census forms online. While the digital option may be a convenience for many, it also makes it more likely that people with low internet proficiency or access may be excluded. Communities with low internet connectivity and low levels of digital literacy may be especially vulnerable to an undercount.¹ According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), approximately 24 million Americans live without access to broadband internet.

Only about 75% of rural Americans and 68% of those living on tribal lands have broadband access. Racial disparities in broadband access also persist – in 2018, approximately half of African American and Hispanic adults reported they had home broadband access, compared to 72% of white adults.² While broadband coverage is lowest on average in rural, Western states, internet deserts also exist in cities, especially among poorer, older, less educated populations. The digital divide, therefore, refers to two separate but related problems: a lack of internet connectivity at home and a lack of digital literacy. Some people may be affected by both issues, while for others only one of the above challenges may be relevant. In the case of the census, some constituents may also face a “device divide,” as the online census form is optimized for mainstream operating systems and devices, but may not work well with inexpensive, off-brand devices that are often used by hard-to-count populations.



2020 Census Outreach Timeline

On or between:	You'll receive:
March 12 – 20, 2020	An invitation to respond online to the 2020 Census. Some households will also receive paper questionnaires.
March 16 – 24, 2020	A reminder letter.

If you haven't responded yet:

March 26 – April 3, 2020	A reminder postcard.
April 8 – 16, 2020	A reminder letter and paper questionnaire.
April 20 – 27, 2020	A final postcard reminder before a U.S. Census Bureau worker follows up in person.
May – July, 2020	U.S. Census Bureau workers visit households that did not fill out the questionnaire on paper, online, or over the phone. The census workers collect information at the door of each house they visit. This process is called non-response follow-up.

How Will Households Be Invited to Participate in the Census?

Unlike past years in which residents could only respond to the census by mail, respondents can fill out the 2020 Census in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail. 95% of all U.S. households will receive an invitation in the mail asking them to participate in the census. In some remote areas, census invitations may be dropped off by a census taker or households may be invited to participate in-person by a census taker. Constituents can use the [CUNY HTC Map](#) to find out how census mailings will be conducted in their census tract. Households will be invited to respond to the census in several ways:

RESOURCE!



INTERNET FIRST

The Census Bureau will mail approximately 80% of all households instructions on how to fill out the census form online. These households will receive a paper questionnaire if they have not responded after four reminders sent by mail.



INTERNET CHOICE

Based on demographic and internet coverage data, the remaining 20% of households will receive instructions both for filling out the online census form as well as a paper questionnaire that can be returned by mail.



PHONE OPTION

All households have the option to respond to the census over the phone. Respondents can also call the toll-free Census Questionnaire Assistance line with questions.

The paper census form is available in two languages, English and Spanish. The online census form and phone options are available in the 13 most commonly-spoken languages in the U.S., while language guides that inform respondents how to take the census will be available in 59 languages.

¹ Byrum, Greta and Meghan McDermott. "Preparing for the Digital Decennial Census." (2019). The New School Digital Equity Laboratory. <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/109566/witnesses/HHRG-116-GO02-Wstate-ByrumG-20190528.pdf>

² "Internet Broadband Fact Sheet." (2019). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>

How Might the Digital Divide Impact Census Participation?

Despite Census Bureau efforts to address the digital divide through targeted outreach, the digital divide remains a barrier to accurate and representative census participation.



Questionnaire Options May Cause

Uncertainty: Internet Choice households may find the decision to choose between the digital census form and the paper questionnaire confusing. Conversely, some Internet First households may prefer to fill out the paper questionnaire and not know how to obtain a copy. Emphasize that respondents have options and that the 2020 Census is not solely online — rather, respondents can choose to respond through whichever method is most convenient to them, including phone or mail. If respondents experience any technical difficulties with the digital questionnaire, there is a danger that they may discourage others from participating by sharing their frustrations. Respondents may be unaware of the option to provide their responses over the phone or may be reluctant to do so if they are charged per minute of talk time by their cellular providers.



Reliance on Mobile Devices: In many households, mobile devices serve as the primary or sole internet access point. Hispanic households are most likely to access the internet from a mobile device. Analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) results demonstrates that online questionnaires filled out using a mobile device are of lower quality than other online questionnaires. Higher likelihood of interruption, data limitations, poor reception, longer load times, small font sizes, and difficulties with selecting the correct dropdown menu option on a touchscreen may all contribute to a greater chance of non-response or incomplete response among those who access the internet primarily through mobile devices.³



Concerns Around Data Privacy and

Security: In the light of recent, highly-publicized data security breaches and a polarized political climate, even internet-connected, digitally literate individuals may be reluctant to submit their information online. Distrust of government may raise concerns about how census data is used and stored. Research demonstrates that hard-to-count (HTC) populations are more likely to prefer responding via the paper questionnaire instead of online in connection to these concerns.⁴

³ “Counting Everyone in the Digital Age” (2017). The Leadership Conference Education Fund and the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality. http://www.georgetownpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/LCEF_2020_Census_Poll_Report-Final-002.pdf

⁴ “Stempowski, Deborah. “2020 Research and Testing: 2015 National Content Test Optimizing Self-Response Report.” U.S. Census Bureau, September 2016. Available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/research-testing/testing-activities/2015-census-tests/national-content-test.html>.

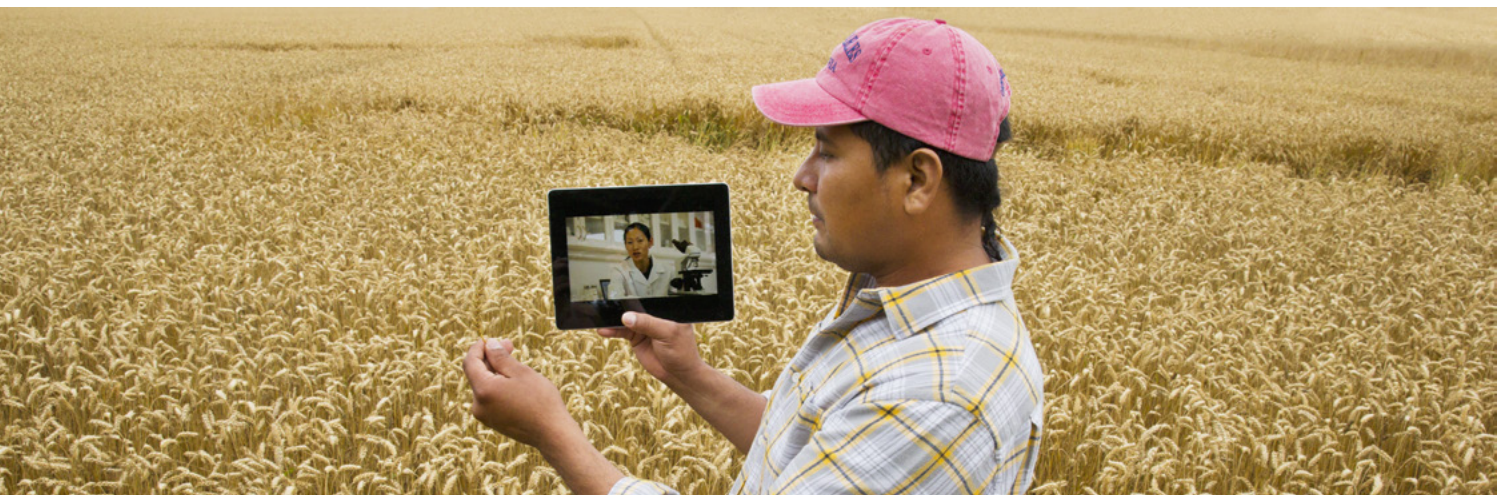
What Can My City Do?

DESPITE CENSUS BUREAU EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH, THE DIGITAL DIVIDE REMAINS A BARRIER TO ACCURATE AND REPRESENTATIVE CENSUS PARTICIPATION.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO CENSUS PARTICIPATION

City governments need coordinated outreach to empower constituents to decide which census response method is most convenient. Reaching residents without home internet access or residents with low levels of digital literacy will require additional touchpoints to overcome barriers to participation. Consider the following questions as your city develops its 2020 Census outreach plan:

- ☑ Do you know where concentrations of people without broadband access are located in your city?
- ☑ Can your city partner with a public library network?
- ☑ Can your city partner with other institutions that offer free wifi (such as schools, universities, and coffee shops)?
- ☑ Does your city have access to trusted messengers in hard-to-count communities who can communicate how, why, and when to take the census?
- ☑ Does your city have educational resources and communication channels to inform constituents how to access and submit the census using the online and phone options?
- ☑ Does your city have educational resources and communication channels to inform constituents on avoidance of common security concerns (such as phishing)?
- ☑ Does your city have plans to set up Questionnaire Assistance Centers (designated locations where constituents can ask census questions and obtain help filling out the census form) or other tools to help constituents navigate the census form on paper, online, over the phone, or on mobile devices? How will your city publicize the availability of these tools and promote their use? Will these tools be available to non-English speakers?
- ☑ Are there touchpoints in your city that constituents see on a regular basis (such as bus shelters, taxi screens, or utility bills) that you can use to communicate how and when to fill out the 2020 Census?



COORDINATION BETWEEN CITIES

Cities across the U.S. are currently preparing for the census. Many municipal governments have expressed interest in learning about the tactics other cities are using to promote a complete count. To combat the threat that the digital divide poses to the 2020 Census, cities have been hard at work designing outreach strategies to better communicate to constituents how to access the census and how it will benefit their communities. Some creative census engagement techniques reported by cities are listed below.

- ✔ **BALTIMORE:** Baltimore has developed a program to award Get Out The Count sub-grants to trusted organizations in hard-to-reach communities, such as barber shops, laundromats, and small community-based organizations, for use in census outreach efforts. **For more information, see the case study below.**
- ✔ **DETROIT:** Detroit has designated Neighborhood Census Champions to serve as grassroots census promoters and advisors to their communities. In addition, Detroit has set up 150 Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) that residents can visit to access the internet and get help filling out their census forms.
- ✔ **MILWAUKEE:** Milwaukee is training institutions and organizations that serve predominantly hard-to-count populations on how to incorporate discussion of the census into their day-to-day work activities.
- ✔ **WASHINGTON, D.C.:** Washington, D.C. has framed the census around issues of equity and social justice, which city officials believe will resonate with their constituents. In addition, the city has purchased tablets and laptops to set up mobile technology centers that residents can visit to fill out the digital census form.
- ✔ **PITTSBURGH:** Pittsburgh has developed a series of data stories that show residents how the census will impact them and their communities. These stories are framed around concrete data points that are drawn from issue areas that residents care about deeply. For example, Pittsburgh's data story on food security describes the number of meals and the number of children fed through school lunch programs as a direct result of an accurate census count.
- ✔ **ATLANTA:** In Atlanta, the mayor's office has launched "block parties" to educate residents on the 2020 Census and reduce anxieties among immigrant communities.
- ✔ **INDIANAPOLIS:** Indianapolis has developed a Complete Count Ambassador program to maintain a multilingual presence at festivals and community events and educate residents about the 2020 Census through fun, approachable games and activities. **For more information, see the case study below.**
- ✔ **LOS ANGELES:** Los Angeles has set up a network of Census Action Kiosks, which are physical locations with regular office hours in the community that are equipped with computers so that residents can securely access census information or fill out the census form. **For more information, see the case study below or view a fact sheet [here](#).**

Case Study

Indianapolis Complete Count Ambassadors Program

WHAT IS THE COMPLETE COUNT AMBASSADORS PROGRAM?

Since April 2019, the city of Indianapolis' Count Me INdy campaign has been working to build a presence at events and festivals in Indianapolis, especially those that reach the city's historically underrepresented communities. While targeted outreach at events was initially spearheaded by municipal government staffers, the Complete Count Ambassadors program was born from a desire for Get Out the Count outreach to be led by trained ambassadors who reflect the community and who can communicate effectively with constituents about the value of participating in the census. As a result, the city of Indianapolis has hired eight part-time ambassadors, contractors who are paid to staff booths and lead census education activities out in the community. The city plans to hire more ambassadors in the coming months, with the goal of expanding ambassador outreach to community gathering places like libraries and community centers and having more languages represented among the ambassador cohort.

WHAT DO COMPLETE COUNT AMBASSADORS DO AT EVENTS?

The Complete Count Ambassadors lead educational activities that frame the 2020 Census in a fun, engaging light. While a tight budget limits the program's ability to distribute census-branded giveaways to the public, the Count Me INdy campaign takes pride in the many creative community engagement tactics they have developed. "We don't want to remind people that they're interacting with the government," asserts Callie Kennington, the Census 2020 Complete Count Committee Program Manager for the city of Indianapolis. "Our goal is to take a topic like the census that may seem complex, daunting, or even boring and make it as relevant, approachable, and fun as possible."

THE COMPLETE COUNT AMBASSADORS HAVE LED A VARIETY OF INNOVATIVE 2020 CENSUS AWARENESS AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AIMED AT PROMOTING AND DEMYSTIFYING THE CENSUS, INCLUDING:

- ✔ **Pledge to Count:** Event attendees sign a pledge to take the census and then have the option to take photos of themselves with their signed pledges in front of a backdrop of diverse portraits created by local Indianapolis artist Tasha Beckwith. When taking the pledge, attendees can opt in to receive text and email reminders to participate in the census during the response period in 2020.
- ✔ **Coloring Books:** The campaign had local artist Aaron Scamihorn design custom coloring books for children focused on the positive impacts of the 2020 Census on Indianapolis. The coloring books are distributed at events by Complete Count Ambassadors and through community partners.
- ✔ **Woof Count:** Complete Count Ambassadors help event attendees to fill out a dog census of sorts called #WoofCount about their dogs, which provide space for an attendee to draw a picture of his or her dog and to answer questions about the dog that parallel the real questions asked on the 2020 Census. This tactic is a fun way to open a discussion about the types of questions that the census asks.
- ✔ **Census Jeopardy:** Complete Count Ambassadors engage event attendees in a Jeopardy-like game in which they answer trivia questions about the census and receive candy or small prizes for participation, creating space for discussion around census fact and fiction.

☑ **Tulip Planting:** The Count Me INdy campaign has distributed thousands of tulip bulbs to community partners and members of the public. Just like the benefits of public census education, these tulip bulbs were planted last fall and will bloom in the spring, serving as a reminder to the entire city to fill out the 2020 Census.

WHAT ADVICE DOES INDIANAPOLIS HAVE FOR OTHER CITIES?

Start as early as possible! Developing promotional strategies and materials takes time. Messaging is also very important — the Complete Count Ambassadors are instructed to keep the information they share about the census very basic and to-the-point. They might start the conversation by asking “do you know what the census is?” and if the respondent does know, the ambassador asks him or her to explain what the

census is as an opportunity to gently correct any misunderstandings. Storytelling is also key! People need to know how the census will affect their lives for the next 10 years and beyond. In Indianapolis, the key message shared by ambassadors is that the census is easy and safe and that it is important for everyone to participate. The core value of the Count Me INdy! campaign is ensuring that ambassadors and materials reflect the community, so that everyone regardless of background can see themselves represented in campaign marketing and hear messaging that resonates with their needs and priorities.

*Special thanks to
Callie Kennington, Count Me INdy! Campaign
Program Manager, City of Indianapolis,
for her insights informing
this case study*



Case Study

Baltimore Census Community Grants Program

WHAT IS THE CENSUS COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM?

In April 2019, the city of Baltimore received a \$250,000 grant from the State of Maryland to conduct census outreach. The city was aware of the persistent gap between the government and local communities and recognized that if they used the funds themselves to conduct outreach or sub-granted to a large nonprofit, any resulting Get Out the Count strategies might not fully reflect the needs and priorities of local hard-to-count communities. The city also noted that traditional methods of conducting census outreach to hard-to-count residents via their other points of contact with the government (for example, at the DMV or a government benefits office) often fit poorly within residents' busy schedules.

In response, Baltimore decided to sub-grant the \$250,000 award as a series of mini-grants to local community institutions in an effort to bring census knowledge and resources to the people. By providing financial sponsorship to events that would happen in these communities regardless, the Census Community Grants program seeks to facilitate census education in places where people already gather, such as barber shops, laundromats, churches, and other local institutions and service providers. Any organizations or businesses working within traditionally undercounted Baltimore census tracts are eligible to apply for funding. Baltimore hopes that hearing about the census from trusted, known community members and institutions will increase residents' willingness to participate. The city also built in incentives for local businesses to participate. For example, businesses may receive tablets with grant funds that residents can use to fill out the digital census form, which can then be used or repurposed by the business after the census is over.

HOW DOES BALTIMORE CONDUCT GRANT OUTREACH?

One of the main challenges of sub-granting to community-based organizations and small businesses in hard-to-count communities was spreading the word that grants were available. The city of Baltimore kick-started outreach with a series of grant program open houses held in eight hard-to-count census tracts across the city. Next, targeted in-person outreach commenced with city staff and Complete Count Committee subcommittee chairs setting up meetings and information sessions in locations that subcommittee members flagged as important to each community. Engaging the Complete Count Committee was vital in spreading the word about the grant and identifying the right places to hold information sessions. Contact information was collected after each community information session and these constituents received first notice when the grant application went live. The grant application was designed to be quick and streamlined, with clear phone and email points of contact that applicants can reach out to with questions.



WHAT HAS WORKED WELL?

- ✔ Partnership with a philanthropic organization helps to facilitate grant disbursement, if funds are being subgranted to local businesses without 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. In Baltimore, the Maryland Philanthropic Network serves as a pass-through organization between the city and grantee organizations. Working with a passthrough organization also helped to ensure that grantees received the full grant amount by eliminating the need for grantee organizations to engage their own fiscal sponsors, which may skim off a portion of the grant.
- ✔ Providing potential applicants with examples of projects they could undertake with the funds so that they aren't starting with a blank slate, while still allowing for flexibility and freedom in proposals.
- ✔ Setting a rolling grant application deadline allowed the city to prioritize applications with different criteria, so that all grants don't end up going to the organizations that have the highest institutional capacity to meet hard deadlines.
- ✔ Baltimore is using the grant application as a broad needs assessment to ascertain what people in specific communities need, so that the city can provide more targeted services once the census is over.

WHAT ADVICE DOES BALTIMORE HAVE FOR OTHER CITIES?

Conducting outreach among local businesses and organizations can be challenging, especially those which are disconnected from philanthropic and local government networks. While Baltimore did not implement a nomination strategy, allowing Complete Count Committee members to nominate local organizations or businesses for funding may be an interesting strategy to explore. Planning division of labor is key, especially if the grant rollout timeline is tight, as launching a grants program is a lot of work. However, there is no need to reinvent the wheel and cities can build upon community grant RFPs that other cities have produced. Finally, striking a casual, matter-of-fact tone and reflecting local cultural norms during community meetings has proven critical in building trust – one staffer remarked that while conducting outreach, it was bad form to attend a community meeting in a suit. This practical approach helped the city of Baltimore gain the trust and respect of individuals and institutions in hard-to-count communities and cultivate potential grant applicants.

*Special thanks to Austin Davis,
Census 2020 Project Manager,
Department of Planning, City of Baltimore, for his
insights informing this case study.*



Case Study

Los Angeles Census Action Kiosks

WHAT ARE CENSUS ACTION KIOSKS?

Census Action Kiosks, or CAKs, are physical locations with internet access via a desktop computer, laptop, or tablet where members of the public can securely access census information online, fill out the online census form, and receive assistance or ask questions if needed. CAKs may or may not be humanly staffed, but all must have regular office hours during which they are open to the public. Most CAKs are stationary and located within public buildings such as government offices, community centers, schools, and libraries, where they are easily recognizable due to unified 2020 Census branding. In addition, there are several mobile CAKs that can be taken to events or public gatherings.

HOW HAVE CAKS BEEN IMPLEMENTED?

The Census Action Kiosk program was designed in collaboration between Los Angeles City and Los Angeles County. The Countywide Outreach Complete Count Committee established a designated subcommittee to operationalize CAKs for the 2020 Census in January 2019. Los Angeles plans to open CAK locations to the public in time for the start of the self-response period in mid-March 2020 so that constituents can seek out census information and understand the purpose of the CAKs once the response period begins.

Organizations in the community can sign up to host a CAK through a webform on the city of Los Angeles and the county of Los Angeles websites. The city works with volunteer organizations to ensure that they can meet key requirements, such as being ADA compliant, committing to maintaining regular office hours and owning approved internet-capable devices. To ensure CAK locations are well-publicized, Los Angeles is recruiting, training and deploying volunteers, also known as Census Goodwill Ambassadors, to organize events at CAK locations. Los Angeles County is also training county employees to staff CAK locations. All CAKs will have resources and collateral materials available in multiple languages to help answer constituent's questions and address concerns. Libraries constitute the largest category of CAK hosts, with community organizations, K-12 schools, municipal offices, and colleges/universities also representing substantial shares of CAK locations. All CAK hosts must fill out a liability waiver and a checklist confirming that they meet all facility requirements to host a CAK. Training is provided to all CAK hosts so that they can knowledgeably answer questions from the public or direct them to an appropriate resource.



Los Angeles has developed parallel programming around the CAKs to connect constituents with their local kiosk. Some examples of parallel programming around Census Action Kiosks is listed below:

- ✔ **Census Goodwill Ambassadors:** Los Angeles has developed the Census Goodwill Ambassadors (CGA) program to recruit, train, and deploy volunteers from hard-to-count communities to assist with informing, educating, and motivating hard-to-count populations to respond to the 2020 Census questionnaire. CGA volunteers will be trained to organize events that are open to the public at CAK locations during the response period. The goal of these events is to engage the local community and show how the CAKs are relevant to them. The city also offers small cash incentives to volunteers and community-based organizations in hard-to-count populations who are willing to host events.
- ✔ **CAK Interactive Map:** Los Angeles County has launched an interactive map of proposed CAK locations. The goal of the map is to generate a better understanding within government of where gaps exist so that Los Angeles can recruit hosts for additional CAK locations in the lead-up to the census.
- ✔ **CAK Finder Tool:** There are plans to launch a web-based tool that allows constituents to locate the CAKs near their location and search for details such as address, contact information, and hours of operation.

WHAT ADVICE DOES LOS ANGELES HAVE FOR OTHER CITIES?

- ✔ **Be flexible:** The CAK subcommittee of the Countywide Outreach Complete Count Committee established benchmarks and stated explicit objectives for the CAK program but maintained flexibility and nimbleness wherever possible. This flexibility has been useful as new state and Census Bureau guidelines have been released, allowing the subcommittee to quickly pivot when needed.
- ✔ **Establish benchmarks and set expectations:** Communication of requirements and estimated time and resource commitment to potential CAKs is key. Many organizations have expressed interest in hosting a CAK location but find it challenging to actually commit. In Los Angeles, registrants must provide their own computers, antivirus software, and other supplies, so it is vital that they understand what they are committing to upfront.
- ✔ **Focus on communication and branding consistency:** Consistency and continuity in branding is important so that constituents can easily recognize CAK locations.
- ✔ **Plan far in advance:** Setting up CAKs can be a significant lift. Be sure to leave your city enough time to mobilize and train volunteers and to build community awareness of the kiosks.

Special thanks to Maria de la Luz Garcia, Director, Census 2020 Initiative, Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles for her insights informing this case study.

A person is holding a black smartphone in their right hand, looking at the screen. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green grass, trees, and a cloudy sky. A dark grey sleeve is visible on the left side of the frame.

IV. Data Privacy & Security

How Does the Census Bureau Keep Data Private?

Many cities have reported data privacy as a key concern among their constituents in the lead-up to the 2020 Census. To maximize census participation, constituents must feel comfortable providing information about themselves and their households and confident that the Census Bureau will protect the privacy of their personal data. However, given an atmosphere of heightened distrust that disproportionately affects hard-to-count communities composed of immigrants and minorities, it is vital that cities find effective channels to reassure constituents that their personal data is secure

What Information Does the Census Collect?

The 2020 Census contains only 10 questions. Some of these questions are asked only once and some are repeated for each individual living in a household. The census asks for respondents to enter basic information such as sex, date of birth, and racial identification. The census does not ask respondents to enter personal data such as a Social Security Number or immigration/citizenship status. Many constituents believe that taking the census requires submitting extensive, personally sensitive data. Cities can counter this belief by informing constituents that the census requires less disclosure of personally identifiable information than many other routine transactions, such as applying for a loan or an apartment rental. To review the questions that the 2020 Census will ask, review this [sample questionnaire](#) provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. For more information on why these questions are asked and how the data is used, see the appendix, *“Why Does the Census Ask That?”*

CLICK LINK!

What Data Privacy Measures Does the Census Bureau Employ to Protect Your Constituents?

U.S. CODE TITLE 13 - LEGAL PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Data confidentiality is of utmost importance to the U.S. Census Bureau. Title 13 of the United States Code of Laws legally prohibits anyone at the Census Bureau from divulging any identifying census information. This legal mandate exists to protect against use or access of census data for purposes other than statistical analysis by the Census Bureau. It is prohibited for census workers to share any census data for any purpose. As a result, census data cannot be shared with private companies or organizations, media entities, or other government agencies (including Immigration and Customs Enforcement). In addition, census data cannot be obtained even if a court order is issued. Census enumerators must swear a strict lifetime oath of nondisclosure and researchers who wish to access census data must undergo thorough background checks and follow strict data security and nondisclosure procedures. Violation of Title 13 is a federal crime with heavy penalties, including at minimum a \$250,000 fine, a five-year prison sentence, or both. No reported breach has occurred since Title 13 was first enacted in 1954.⁵

DIFFERENTIAL PRIVACY

Beginning in 2020, the Census Bureau developed a new privacy technique designed to maintain data privacy in the face of modern threats to confidentiality. This technique, called differential privacy, uses advanced cryptographic principles to grant the Census Bureau granular control over census

data confidentiality. Differential privacy dramatically reduces the chances that a bad actor could reidentify individuals based on publicly available census data by strategically injecting “noise” or intentional false values into the census dataset. For additional technical details on how differential privacy works, refer to a high-level explanatory blog developed by the Arab American Institute [here](#).

In practical terms, constituents should know that differential privacy prevents their census responses from being linked to their real identities. For example, constituents who may have more household members living in their rental unit than their lease permits should not worry that accurately completing the census may jeopardize their housing security. This is because differential privacy makes it impossible for census data on household size to be cross-referenced against external databases maintained by landlords or rental associations. Similarly, differential privacy prevents census data from being linked to any record of an individual constituent’s immigration or citizenship status.

Communicating to Build Trust

Trusted community messengers play a key role in reassuring constituents that their census data will be kept confidential. Providing training and materials that explain how the Census Bureau keeps its data safe to respected community members will empower these trusted messengers to accurately answer their communities’ questions about census data privacy. This [factsheet](#) and [web resource](#) offer straightforward explanations of how the Census Bureau ensures confidentiality of responses, which can easily be shared with community messengers. In addition, remember the following tips when communicating about the census to constituents. Sharing these simple facts with trusted messengers and constituents will help to build trust in the security and privacy of census data.

- ✔ Ensure that your constituents are aware that the Census Bureau will never ask for sensitive personal information, such as a Social Security Number.
- ✔ Constituents can review a copy of the 2020 Census form [here](#). The form that constituents will be asked to fill out (either on paper, online, or over the phone) will contain the same questions.
- ✔ The Census Bureau provides a detailed explanation of how they will use the data collected from each question on the 2020 Census. You can view these explanations [here](#).
- ✔ Completing the census form requires less disclosure of personally-identifiable information than many other routine transactions, such as filling out an application for a loan or apartment.
- ✔ Ensure that your constituents understand that the privacy of census data is strictly protected under U.S. law. Divulging personal census data is a federal crime with heavy penalties, including at minimum a \$250,000 fine or a five-year prison sentence.
- ✔ Constituents should know that data privacy is the Census Bureau’s highest priority. The Census Bureau has implemented an innovative data privacy technique that uses advanced cryptography to ensure that census responses cannot be linked to a respondent’s real-world identity.
- ✔ The Census Bureau will never ask respondents to reveal their immigration or citizenship status. There will not be a citizenship question on the 2020 Census.

Appendix

“Why Does the Census Ask That?”: A GUIDE TO HOW CENSUS DATA IS USED

Many people erroneously believe that filling out the census will require them to divulge highly personal or sensitive information to the government. It is important that cities communicate that the census consists of only 10 basic demographic questions. In addition to emphasizing the Census Bureau’s data protection safeguards like Title 13 and differential privacy, explaining why the Census Bureau asks for certain information may help to make the census feel less invasive to constituents who are anxious about the privacy of their data. Below you can find an overview of how the data from key census questions is used by the Census Bureau.⁶

AGE

Question: What is [household member]’s age and date of birth?

Asked of: Each household member

Asked since: 1790

Reason: Age data helps the government plan and fund specific programs that provide funding or services to specific age groups, like children or older adults.

Examples:

- Age data is used in programs that provide financial assistance to senior citizens. For example, the federal Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program relies on census data to allocate funding to help older adults pay their utility bills.
- School districts use census data to identify how

many school-aged children live in an area, enabling better planning for long-term staffing, funding, and facilities needs.

SEX

Question: What is [household member]’s sex?

Asked of: Each household member

Asked since: 1790

Reason: Data disaggregated by sex helps in planning and funding government programs targeting men or women and to enforce anti-discrimination laws and policies.

Examples:

- Census data on sex is used to allocate funding to colleges and universities to increase participation of minority women in science, engineering, and technology programs under the Higher Education Act.
- City planners use census data that is disaggregated by sex to predict future need for childcare, health care, and other services.
- Census data disaggregated by sex is used by local law enforcement and policymakers to evaluate and reduce instances of gender discrimination in housing, education, and employment.

⁶ Adapted from Questions Planned for the 2020 Census and American Community Survey: Federal Legislative and Program Uses (2018). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/2020/operations/planned-questions-2020-acr.pdf>

RACE

Question: What is this person's race? [Select one or more race options and print national/tribal/ethnic origins if applicable].

Asked of: Each household member

Asked since: 1790

Reason: Race data is used to plan and fund government programs that provide services to specific groups and to ensure equal opportunity. The census race categories are based on self-identification of race and selection of multiple categories or "other" is permitted.

Examples:

- Race data is used to monitor and enforce local compliance with the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act, which mandate equal opportunity in employment.
- Census data on an area's American Indian and Alaska Native population is used by federal and local governments to understand how many people are eligible to participate in certain government programs, such as the Indian Health Service and Indian Community Development Block Grant program.

HISPANIC ORIGIN

Question: Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? [Select yes or no and print national or ethnic origins if applicable].

Asked of: Each household member

Asked since: 1790

Reason: Data on Hispanic origin is used to help enforce antidiscrimination laws and policies. This question is separate from race because people of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Examples:

- Hispanic origin data is used to monitor and enforce equal employment opportunity under the Civil Rights Act.
- Local governments use Hispanic origin data to

identify portions of the population who may not be getting necessary medical services and plan interventions to connect these populations with the healthcare they need.

RELATIONSHIP

Question: How is this person related to Person 1? [Select one option. Available options include opposite-sex and same-sex spouse or partner, family relationships such as child, sibling, and parent, and options for unrelated household members such as roommates].

Asked of: Each household member except Person 1. Person 1 is the household member who owns the residence or pays the rent, if applicable. If not applicable, Person 1 can be any adult living at the residence.

Asked since: 1880

Reason: Relationship data helps governments and planners to understand the size and composition of families and provide services and policies to meet local household needs.

Examples:

- Understanding family composition, such as the number and ages of children, helps local governments to target programs such as Head Start and the Children's Health Insurance Program to families that need them most.
- Census data on household size and type (i.e., single people, couples, families with children, multi-generational families, etc.) helps city planners to ensure sufficient housing is available to meet local needs.

TENURE (OWNER/RENTER)

Question: Is this house, apartment, or mobile home owned with a mortgage/loan, owned free and clear, rented, or occupied without payment of rent?

Asked of: Person 1. Person 1 is the household member who owns the residence or pays the rent, if applicable.

If not applicable, Person 1 can be any adult living at the residence.

Asked since: 1890

Reason: Tenure data are used by governments to ensure that adequate housing is available to meet an area's needs, to allocate funding for housing assistance programs, and to monitor for and combat housing discrimination.

Examples:

- Planners use census tenure data to understand changes in local private housing markets and implement taxes, housing assistance, and zoning policies accordingly.
- Property developers use tenure data to evaluate local need and demand for new housing developments.
- Tenure data, in combination with other census data on age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, is used by government to enforce the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which made housing discrimination illegal.

OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS

Questions:

- How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2020?
- Were there any additional people staying here on April 1, 2020, that you did not include in Question 1?
- What is Person 1's telephone number?
- What is [household member]'s name?
- Does this person usually live or stay somewhere else?

Asked of: Person 1. Person 1 is the household member who owns the residence or pays the rent, if applicable. If not applicable, Person 1 can be any adult living at the residence.

Reason: These operational questions will not be used in any counts published by the Census Bureau. Operational questions are asked to better administer the data collection process and ensure greater accuracy of collected data. Contact information, along with all collected census data, is carefully protected under federal law to maintain the confidentiality of respondents.

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Additional Resources

RESOURCE!

Election Cyber Incident Communication Plan Template

This resource from the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School outlines guidelines for response plan formulation should a cybersecurity breach occur. While intended for elections, the resource is also applicable to the 2020 Census.

Social Media User Policies on Disinformation

Each social media platform has different policies defining the types of content that may be flagged for removal from the platform. Understanding these policies can help city officials know how to best react if misleading social media posts appear.



Facebook:

- [Facebook Community Standards on Integrity and Authenticity](#): As of December 2019, Facebook has also updated its user policy to [explicitly ban ads trying to discourage census participation](#)
- [How to report Community Standards violations on Facebook](#)



Instagram:

- [Instagram policy on reducing the spread of false information](#): Instructions on how to report false information on Instagram from the app are included in this policy
- [Webform to report Instagram Community Guidelines violations](#): No Instagram account is needed to report content through this form



Twitter:

- [Twitter Platform Manipulation and Spam Policy](#)
- [How to report violations of Twitter's rules and policies](#)



Snapchat:

- [Snapchat Terms and Conditions](#): See Section 6, "Respecting Others' Rights".
- [Snapchat deceptive content policy for advertisers](#)
- How to report problematic content on Snapchat [in the app](#) and [online](#)



YouTube:

- [YouTube Spam, Deceptive Practices, and Scams Policies](#). Content intending to mislead the public about the census is explicitly banned under this policy
- [YouTube Impersonation Policy](#)
- [How to report Community Guidelines violations on YouTube](#)



Pinterest:

- [Pinterest Community Guidelines](#): See Safety section subheading on harmful misinformation
- [How to report Acceptable Use Policy violations on Pinterest](#)



Reddit:

- [Reddit Content Policy](#): See Section 3, "Unwelcome Content"
- [How to report content on Reddit with or without an account](#)

Notes



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