t’s time to talk about the 2020 census. That’s probably the last thing on most people’s minds right now, especially with all of the other headlines screaming at us on a daily, and sometimes hourly, basis.

Thankfully there were over 150 people thinking about it in North Carolina, when the NC Counts Coalition held a day long conference at NC State’s McKimmon Center on January 31st, 2019. Stacey Carless, Exec. Director, has taken the lead in the effort to make sure North Carolina is positioned well to ensure a complete and accurate count.

But she can’t do it alone. There is a need for a massive public education and outreach program in which we can all take part. There are even paid jobs too! If you couldn’t attend but would like to review the agenda with links to the excellent presentations you can find it here.

We all understand that the census is a count of every person living in the US, so this tool kit will summarize the highlights from the conference, focusing on the overall challenges we face, the undercount issues (especially of children under 6), and the opportunities that lay ahead. For a primer on what the census is all about, check out our earlier post here.

The bottom line is that we are all affected by the census count, and completing it accurately ourselves is just one part. We need to make sure our neighbors in hard to count communities are also counted. Identifying local community leaders, leveraging our existing networks, and being creative with outreach programs are ways in which we can all take part.

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The Census and Gerrymandering

The next election for all 170 NC General Assembly seats will be November 3, 2020. If our state legislature, SCOTUS or Congress fails to end partisan gerrymandering before then, the elected officials taking their seats in January 2021 will be drawing the new voting districts based on this census data. The consequences of the next election will last an entire decade, and our democracy can not afford another 4 election cycles under unconstitutional maps in which politicians select their voters and are only beholden to their campaign donors. With NC’s growth we are poised to gain an additional seat in Congress, so what happens here will affect the rest of the country as well. Fair maps and fair representation starts with an accurate census.
WHAT WILL THE CENSUS MEAN TO NORTH CAROLINA?

With the spotlight on NC’s multiple gerrymandering cases, it’s important to remember that NC will likely be allocated one more seat in Congress after the 2020 count, and the makeup of local government boards and commissions will be affected also. The census will shape critical decisions for our economy, our infrastructure, educational and healthcare needs as well. Allocations of power and money affect all of us, which is why we need to be concerned with the overall response rate.

By the Numbers
Census data determines over $16 Billion of funds to North Carolina annually. Since the data is used for a 10 year period, that’s a really large number to fathom for a decade of investment. To break it down, it equates to $1623 per person in NC, per year.

The average response rate in NC for the 2010 census was 76%, which was slightly higher than the 72% national rate. However, several NC counties came in at under 70%, and those numbers matter. Estimates on the undercount are not perfect, so the more accurate the count is, the more money those communities will eventually see. The goal for the 2020 census is to increase the response rate in NC by 5 points.

Economy: Higher numbers mean businesses can make better decisions on investments and development which equates to more jobs.

Education: A complete count provides more funding, which will in turn benefit our children and our workforce development. Funding for Head Start, Special Education, and Title 1 Grants to school districts are direct recipients of federal funding. Nearly $1B annually is spent on NC education.

Healthcare: Lives will be saved based on an accurate count. There is a direct relationship between the census and access to healthcare, Medicaid expansion funds, and the reduction of healthcare costs for everyone when fewer people are uninsured. We have already paid taxes towards $4B of federal funding earmarked for NC Medicaid expansion, which would also create 40,000 jobs in NC. Not using this on top of a potential undercount is depriving our residents of what is owed to them.

Infrastructure: With more funding we will see safer roads, less traffic and better access to jobs. Nearly $1B per year is spent on transportation needs.
For the first time, residents will be able to complete the census online. That brings with it benefits in data analysis and lower costs, but many more challenges as well. Informing people about privacy practices (the information is not disclosed publicly for 72 years), educating them that it’s the law to complete it, and explaining how important it is to ensure fair funding and congressional representation will be key factors in getting a good response. An increasing distrust in government overall will affect results this time around, so identifying the trusted messengers in local communities is critical.

**Jobs:** In the first few months of 2019 census offices will open across the state, which will start the address canvassing operations. There will be a recruitment drive to hire for this purpose, and they will work in earnest through the fall of 2019 on address updating.

As of January 2019, offices are open in Raleigh and Charlotte, with an increase to 40 offices across the state eventually. With 250,000 jobs to be filled nationally they will need a lot of applicants. Apply at [https://www.census.gov//fieldjobs](https://www.census.gov//fieldjobs) and [https://2020census.gov/jobs](https://2020census.gov/jobs).

**Action Alert:** Work has already begun to engage partners and form local Complete Count Committees across the state. These committees should include representatives from the town planning dept. as well as members of the business community, social services, healthcare representatives, community organizations, libraries, education leaders, faith based leaders, and other heads of local government departments. Anyone can start or serve on a Complete Count Committee, and the earlier they are formed the better, starting now!

The NC partnership coordinator is based out of the Atlanta regional office, and can be reached via e-mail at atlanta.rcc.partnership@census.gov, or at 404-730-3834. They are available to help you set up a local committee and provide all of the resources your team needs.

Take a look at Gaston County, NC’s efforts in the 2010 census, which resulted in a higher than average response rate. This provides a good insight into the types of information local areas will glean from an accurate count, and gives examples of the outreach efforts undertaken.
**What you can do:**

- Create or join a local Complete Count Committee (CCC) in your town, and encourage others to join you.
- Identify local community leaders who would be considered "trusted messengers" for hard to count communities. Faith leaders, educators, social workers, immigration counselors and refugee service providers will need to become involved in this outreach effort and join CCCs. Black community leaders and organizations geared towards minorities are critical to the effort.
- Contact the Atlanta Regional Office with any questions you or your local leaders may have at atlanta.rcc.partnership@census.gov, or at 404-730-3834.
- Raise awareness in your networks by sharing this toolkit and the information provided across social media, in newsletters, at community gatherings and in general conversation. Get creative with shareable graphics, tee shirt designs, info tables at local events and more! Printable resources can be found online at NC Counts Coalition.
- Are you active in your local precinct organization or Get Out The Vote drives? This is an excellent opportunity for precinct organizers and voter registration groups to spread the word about the importance of the census and counting everyone in the household as they reach out to their neighbors and community members.
- Contact your state and congressional representatives and ask them to ensure early and adequate funding is available for implementing the census as well as funding for outreach and education efforts. The 2 year NC state budget is in the planning stages now and will be presented in May 2019. Now is the time to contact state leaders and ask them to supplement the federal funding which will not include enough for local outreach and educational programs.

**Census Timeline Highlights:**

April 1, 2019 will be a Day of Action with the NC Counts Coalition. More information on that can be found at www.nccensus.org in the near future and by signing up for their updates at https://www.nccensus.org/get-involved.

An important date to note is June 2019, when the census questionnaire will go to print. This means all questions are final, including the decision on whether or not to add the controversial citizenship question. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross will be testifying before Congress on March 14th, 2019, regarding that concern. Mark your calendars to tune in to CSPAN that day.

Early 2020 will see the start of an operation to count those living in group quarters, such as shelters, dorms, nursing homes, prisons, military bases, RV parks, etc. Local governments and Complete Count Committees will be crucial in this process.

**What to look for:** Around mid-March 2020 invitations will go out to all residents, with an option to respond online, by phone or by mail. Most people will receive a postcard with a website and activation code which they can use to access their form and complete it online. There will also be a reference to an 800# to call in responses and an option to request a paper copy. Follow up postcards and a final paper questionnaire will be sent to non-responders, before a door to door effort begins. Other residents will receive their forms by hand delivery to rural and non USPS housing units. While self-responses can come in as early as March 23rd, April 1, 2020 is considered “Census Day” for reference purposes.

It doesn’t stop there though! The follow up process starts almost immediately, starting with colleges and universities whose students will be leaving in May. By September local census offices will be closing, and on December 31st, 2020, the final results will be delivered to the President.
It is estimated that 950,000 NC residents live in hard to count communities (HTC). That could increase this year with the challenges of internet access affecting the response rate, and could adjust the maps typically used to determine likely concentrations of hard to count persons.

There are 4 elements that determine which communities are hard to count. Those include:

- Hard to Locate; such as housing units not identified or people not wanting to be found
- Hard to Contact; highly mobile people, those experiencing homelessness, and gated communities
- Hard to Persuade; those suspicious of the government and having low levels of civic engagement
- Hard to Interview; language barriers, low literacy levels, lack of internet access

Persons typically falling in a HTC category include:

- Renters
- Young adults 18-24
- Minority groups including Hispanics, African-Americans and Native Americans
- New migrants
- Immigrants and Refugees
- Homeless
- Children under 6

Challenges faced in many HTC communities include a high distrust of government in general, and a need to identify local trusted messengers who can assist with the outreach efforts. The messaging and education materials need to be streamlined to make it as accessible as possible, and barriers to language and literacy must be removed. This is where a local Complete Count Committee is very important, as they will be the best resources within a community to reach everyone. As mentioned before, these committees can be citizen led and have full access to a partnership coordinator out of the Atlanta office for resources and support.

Reaching the hard to count population will be the difference in getting an average response rate and reaching the goal of 5 points higher than in 2010. It will take time to identify local leaders, develop committees and educational materials, and get funding as needed.

**Call to Action:** Lobbying NC General Assembly representatives, especially those covering districts containing a large number of hard to count communities, should be immediate as the NC state budget process gets underway this spring. Additional funding for outreach programs, educational materials and advertising needs to supplement any basic federal funding received.

Do you have social media, graphic design or other outreach skills? Your talents will be useful to local Complete Count Committees and those working with the NC Counts Coalition. Since social media is a new feature since the 2010 census there will be plenty of new opportunities to spread the word. You can reach out to any of the organizations on the [NC Census Task Force](#), Stacey Carless of the NC Counts Coalition, or your local town manager and planning committee to offer your assistance. Help make the #2020Census cool!
THE CENSUS AND THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

The LGBTQ community isn’t necessarily a hard to count community; it’s an uncounted community.

For the first time ever though, the census will ask whether adults are involved in a same sex or opposite sex partnership. That may be a result of the 2010 “Queer the Census” campaign to heighten awareness for this community, when creative activists distributed hot pink stickers which were placed on the outer envelopes to identify themselves and ask to be counted.

Ames Simmons from Equality NC highlights three key reasons why being counted is a priority:

1. To identify concentrations of LGBTQ populations. This can help dispel the myth of large urban concentrations only.
2. If you aren’t counted you aren’t seen, and it then becomes easier to ignore their needs.
3. Being counted helps non-profits understand where the needs are.

You can access a copy of Equality NC’s presentation here. For more information on the census and the LGBTQ efforts, needs and actions, visit the National LGBTQ Task Force site.

THE UNDERCOUNT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Children under 6 are the most likely segment of the population to be undercounted, primarily because their numbers are higher in hard to count households. According to the Census Bureau, in 2010 there were 25,000 NC children ages 0-5 NOT counted. That’s the equivalent of 1,000 classrooms! In 2020 there is a risk of 73,000 young children being missed in NC.

The primary reasons young children are not counted include:

- No English spoken in the home
- They live in a Hispanic or minority household (twice the rates of undercount vs white households)
- They live with grandparents or in a complex household
- Confusion about the form; even when adults return the form young kids are left off

Consequences of not counting all children include:

- Less representation for their communities in Congress, state legislatures, and on school boards
- Less federal funding for children’s programs, including health care and education
- Inadequate data and planning information for policymakers, researchers, business leaders, and advocates
- Distorted data in all Census Bureau surveys for the next decade.

The Partnership for America’s Children has formed a committee of national, state and local organizations and has developed a campaign called “Count All Kids” with resources and information available to help ensure every child is counted. This should be a go-to resource for anyone involved in youth organizations or those working with minority groups to ensure our children are counted.

On a local level, NC Child is doing fantastic work around this issue. Use this link for a copy of their presentation and printable fact sheet. Then call your legislator and share this info: “NC failed to count an estimated 25,000 young children in the 2010 Census. This represents the 8th highest undercount of 0-4-year-olds in the nation, impacting our state’s federal funding and government representation. Do you support allocating at least $1 million in state funding to expand outreach ahead of the 2020 Census and ensure that North Carolinians of all ages are counted?”
Laura Wright, an Equal Justice Works Fellow with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice (SCSJ) provided some insight into the current situation regarding having a citizenship question on the 2020 census for the first time. From her presentation on the litigation update:

“Earlier this month on January 15th, 2019, the District Court for the Southern District of New York struck down the citizenship question from the 2020 Census. In the court’s robust and fact bound decision, Judge Furman found that Secretary Ross violated the public trust and that he misled the public with a quote “sham justification” for why the citizenship question should be added to the census.

In vacating the citizenship question, Judge Furman described the Secretary’s decision as unlawful and contrary to law. This case was brought by sixteen states, including North Carolina, seven cities, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.”

Essentially, the ruling found that Secretary Ross, among other things:
- Ignored his duty to rely on administrative records and violated administrative law, which serves as a check on the wide array of powers granted to those in authority
- Failed to report his plan on a timely basis
- Made a pre-determined decision which was not as described to Congress
- Provided no data that this question was necessary to enforce the Voting Rights Act as claimed
- Failed to consider the effects of privacy issues and how this data would potentially be used

This is just one of 7 current lawsuits on the topic. Mark your calendar for March 14th, when Congress will be hearing testimony from Secretary Ross regarding his reasons and intentions. Congress has the power to remove the question itself. They can also determine how such data would be used and keep it from being given to states for redistricting purposes.

The final census form will go to print in June 2019, so all decisions must be final by then, regardless of appeals, which will go to SCOTUS.

**Action Alert:** At the federal level, contact your US representatives through the US Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, and ask that they strike any citizenship question from the census. If citizenship data does get collected, ask them to restrict its usage in redistricting purposes by the states.

At the state level, all redistricting calculations should be based on TOTAL population, with no regard to citizenship. There is a concern that some states will use citizenship data to limit funding and representation of minority communities. Contact your local state representatives and ask them to provide a statement that any census based citizenship data will not be used for redistricting or negative targeting purposes. For more reading on this issue follow the “updates” on the NC Census website.
Recent polling and focus groups were conducted by NALEO (Nat’l. Assoc. Of Latino Elected Officials), Color of Change, and AAJC (Asian Americans Advancing Justice). While minority groups sometimes share similar issues, there are distinct concerns around the census that require targeted messaging and strategies in order to increase the participation level. Funding messages resonated highest in the Latino and Black communities while ensuring fair representation in Congress garnered the least response across all three groups.

NALEO

NALEO surveyed 1600 Latinos nationally in April 2018, as well as conducting four focus groups based in Charlotte, NC and Rio Grande, TX.

Their findings include:

- Once people looked at a paper census, the hesitation, fear levels, and cynicism rose, and the citizenship question produced the highest levels of anxiety.
- 75% preferred a paper, mail in form
- 40% said it was not convenient to complete it online
- Door knocks were not popular
- Of those that used social media, e-mail and Facebook were used the most, with Twitter the least
- A message that the census was “convenient, safe and required” fared best among those surveyed
- The message that census data provides “funding for local schools and community programs” fared best in the focus groups

The most effective and trusted messengers in the Latino community include family members first, then healthcare providers, Latino community organizations and educators. Elected officials were the least trusted messengers.

Over 11% of those families with children said they may not count them on the census. More understanding of this needs to occur to improve the undercount of minority children.

Use this link to learn more about the survey results and specific messaging. To get more involved with NALEO’s census outreach in the Latino community take these steps:

- Visit www.NALEO.org/Census2020
- Email: censusGOTC@naleo.org with “Subscribe” in the subject line to join their Census email list.
- Text “CENSUS” to 97779 to join their SMS/Census Get Out the Count list.
Color of Change

Color of Change has 1.4M members nationally, with 145,000 here in NC. They have identified North Carolina as a priority in their census work. Their research included 6 focus groups, 30 phone conversations in rural communities, and an online survey of 800.

Most black millennials were not aware of the upcoming census, but the majority of black adults over 35 had a positive impression and recognized its importance. While most were not concerned personally with the addition of a citizenship question, they did recognize that it would likely decrease participation in the immigrant communities.

"Ensuring funding for programs in my community" was the most persuasive messaging across all generations. A specific mention of Medicaid and food stamp funding was important. Focusing on the specific funding impact to the community will help increase participation and help spread awareness.

Oprah, Michelle Obama and LeBron were by far the highest perceived trusted messengers! That aside, local black community leaders were a close second, and will play a pivotal role in encouraging response.

To see the full presentation from Color of Change, use this link.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

AAJC also surveyed 1600 participants in a study on messaging, with ten focus groups across Chinese, South Asian, Korean, Southeast Asian and Mixed Asian communities. 55% had heard nothing about the census, with less than half knowing it is a requirement to participate! 68% knew nothing about the possible addition of a citizenship question.

Their findings show:
- Need to raise awareness of 2020 Census
- Concern about citizenship
- Preference for paper form and online options
- Top messages evoke use of family and resources – Use of children or community is ethnic group dependent
- Preference for diversity in advertising

The most widely received messaging included a focus on the family, and providing the services needed for families to be successful.

Click here for the complete presentation by Asian Americans Advancing Justice. For more information about Asian Americans and the census you can visit their website here.

Resources:

NCcensus.org: Resource for fact sheets, news and updates, local government and citizen involvement. Coordinating the NC Task Force and supporting local Complete Count Committees
NCChild.org: NC resource for ensuring all children are counted and receive necessary funding and services
Census.nc.gov: NC government resource on the census
Census.gov: Federal government resource on the census
SCSJ mini-grants: 2010 report - hoping to provide the same grant options for 2020
Disaster Mitigation: information on how to plan ahead for disasters which could affect the census response rate
Countallkids.org: a national campaign to reduce the undercount of children

Sign up to join the “Count All Kids” committee here:

and share this excellent video in your networks and across your community!