
Our daily lives have been changing rapidly in light of the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the Washington, D.C. area, where I live, restaurants, small businesses, movies and communal gathering spots, libraries, schools and universities are mostly shut down. Some parts of the country are experiencing shelter-in-place orders. Every day we see the spread of covid-19 increasing along with more deaths. As expected, new weekly unemployment claims are also rising.

Health and economic experts tell us before things get better, we can expect hospitals to face a surge, along with increases in food insecurity, depression, small business bankruptcy, and maybe loss of health insurance for workers who need to quit or are laid off. Volatility and declines in financial markets could continue.

Funders have an important role in being realistic about the situation but also providing the leadership to calm fears and panic. Funders are encouraging grantees and others they encounter to practice social distancing to do our part to flatten the curve. We know this is a fluid situation and our funding needs to be responsive and nimble. Funders are also giving grantees the flexibility to be responsive and nimble by relaxing grant requirements, even moving existing grants to general support.

Even while we do all we can to ensure people are safe from covid-19, we cannot forget the once-a-decade importance of filling out the census. As the Census Bureau notes, it's never been easier to fill out the census – online, by phone, and by mail. The Census Counts Campaign, which is co-chaired by The Leadership Conference, NALEO Educational Fund, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, has been echoing the Census Bureau's message about the ease of filling out the census during this time of crisis. Their talking points are repeated at the end of this email in case you want to send them to your grantees.

We are in regular communication with the Census Bureau, which is attempting to respond to the crisis. Almost daily, they are putting out new information and changing census operations when needed. Many of the changes being made by the Bureau are technical and intended to help those involved with census operations adjust.

Today the Bureau announced they will be extending the census taking by two weeks until Aug. 14. They will also begin the door-to-door enumeration in most neighborhoods two weeks later on May 28 (instead of May 13). Enumerators will be knocking on those household doors where the census has not yet been returned.

The bottom line: the census letters should have now reached most households. This is the time to fill it out, especially for people who are not able to go to work. With children at home, it's an opportunity to explain what the census is and why it is important. Moreover, filling it out makes it less likely that an enumerator will need to come to your door.

The good news is that the Bureau reports that the number of households filling out the census is about on par with their predictions. But we all know that those who immediately fill out the census aren't necessarily those who are historically undercounted. So, outreach by trusted messengers will still be needed to ensure a fair and accurate count.

Earlier in the week I [wrote a piece](#) about the census and covid-19 and how nonprofit trusted messengers are pivoting to virtual and digital outreach approaches to continue reaching those who will likely be hard to reach and count. It is a remarkable story about groups across the

country that had to cancel in-person events of all types, canvassing, and opportunities to share tablets and computers to fill out the census. They are quickly turning to a deeper emphasis on social media platforms. They are ramping up text messaging campaigns and phone banking. And they are exploring old and new school strategies for outreach that do not involve in-person interactions.

I want you to know that the national funder collaborative and the Census Counts Campaign are working hand-in-hand to do everything we can to help groups working on census and civic engagement (including voter education and outreach) to make the needed shift to approaches that do not involve face-to-face interactions.

As my last email indicated, we're looking at national efforts to help state and local groups that include: (a) texting, phone banking and tele-townhalls; (b) expanding a Census Digital U (created at the end of last year) to provide the tools and technical assistance to pivot to digital; and (c) ads (both digital and non-digital). We're talking to state and local groups about what they need and how best to deliver what they need. And we're trying to raise additional emergency funds to help implement this needed transition.

Maybe one lesson from this pandemic is the realization that digital organizing needs to be integrated into all aspects of our communications and outreach strategies. It is no longer a function that should be funded separately from other organizational needs.

As an aside, it will come as modest relief that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency put out a statement on Wednesday: "ICE will not carry out enforcement operations at or near health care facilities..." ICE will continue to investigate criminal activity.

Let me close by thanking many of you for sharing what you're doing in response to the pandemic, particularly related to the census. We are using the information you are sending us in formulating next steps. Please do keep sharing the information with me and/or Jocelyn Bissonnette jbissonnette@funderscommittee.org at the Funders Census Initiative.

Jocelyn is also hosting a weekly call on Fridays at 2 pm (ET) for funders to discuss the latest situation with the census. The first of these will be today. If interested: [REGISTER HERE](#).

Even as we funders adjust our funding, we all need to push a two-part message of stay safe and fill out the census.

As the Chair of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, said on Wednesday: "The 2020 Census has begun, and you can complete your census form safely and easily—online, on the phone, or by mail. By responding now, you will ensure that the Census Bureau does not need to send a census worker to your door."

MESSAGE FROM THE CENSUS COUNTS CAMPAIGN RE: COVID-19:

- Public health and safety is absolutely critical at this moment of uncertainty. That is the case for the public as well as Census Counts organizations, staff, and volunteers.
- We must fulfill our constitutional obligation to complete the 2020 Census and count every single person in the United States. Our country's future depends on it.
- Fortunately, it has never been easier and more accessible to respond to the census on your own -- online, over the phone, or by mail -- all without having to meet someone in person.

- The 2020 Census is a modern, technology-enabled process that was designed precisely to offer multiple ways to respond. The Census Bureau is able to make necessary adaptations at the local level for special operations as well, as needed.
- By now, many households have received an invitation in the mail to complete the census. This was planned and continues uninterrupted by the coronavirus.
- The census website 2020Census.gov is also live and can accept your response in English and 12 non English languages or by calling phone questionnaire assistance: <https://2020census.gov/en/ways-to-respond/responding-by-phone.html>).
- The Census Bureau, alongside the hundreds of organizations in the Census Counts Coalition, is prepared and is continuing to do everything possible to accurately complete the census.
- Right now, our priority is clear: Making sure that as many people as possible complete the census online, by phone, or by mail. It has never been easier to self-report.

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