

Everyone Counts: The Importance of the 2020 Census to Massachusetts Nonprofits

Under the U.S. Constitution, all people in the United States are counted every 10 years in the Census. Its impact is immense. Census data determine political representation and the allocation of federal funds for social programs, including more than \$16 billion for Massachusetts. The Commonwealth could lose \$2,372 of federal funding per year for each person not counted. In addition, new challenges are emerging for the 2020 Census which will make collaborations and cross-sector partnerships especially important – including in Massachusetts.

This edition of Commonwealth Insights provides insights from four experts about why the Census is so important, what is at stake for Massachusetts, and the role that nonprofits can play to ensure a fair and accurate Census count.

A National Perspective

Mary Jo Hoeksema
Co-Director, The Census Project



Since January 2004, Mary Jo has been the Director of Government Affairs for the Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC). In addition to representing PAA and APC, since 2008, Mary Jo has co-directed The Census Project, a broad-based

network of national, state, and local organizations that support a fair and accurate Census.

Q: What is at stake in the 2020 Census?

We want an accurate, inclusive count because the numbers determine the fair, equitable, and geographic distribution of some \$600 billion annually in

KEY POINTS:

- Census data drives the distribution of over \$16 billion to Massachusetts and \$600 billion nationwide for critical services, as well as the allocation of political representation.
- The 2020 Census will present unprecedented challenges including the first all-digital census, a potential citizenship question, and ongoing funding challenges.
- The nonprofit sector has a key role to play in ensuring a fair and accurate Census count.

federal assistance to programs that nonprofits rely on to target and deliver services.

The 2020 Census will be the first high-tech census offering an internet response option. We're very concerned about how secure and reliable the system will be, and if it will be ready to handle the number of people who might not have otherwise participated.

Q: Why should the nonprofit sector engage in the 2020 Census?

Census data influence a range of decisions that we care about in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. You want to ensure that everyone is counted once and in the right place so that your community gets its fair share of federal resources and can deliver services effectively. People need those services desperately. Nonprofits are on the front lines, in a position to help encourage their clients to participate in the Census and to understand how their involvement benefits their communities.

Q: Is there anything else nonprofits can do to engage on the Census?

Be aware of pivotal points in the federal funding cycle and be ready to engage with the Massachusetts Congressional delegation. The Massachusetts delegation is a very supportive one, but you never want

to take anyone's support for granted, especially in this tough budget climate with so many other competing funding priorities. The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) alerts its members when Congress is making critical funding decisions.

A Massachusetts Perspective

Avi Green

Executive Director, Scholars Strategy Network



Avi is the Executive Director of the Scholars Strategy Network. Before starting at the Scholars Strategy Network in 2013, Avi served as Executive Director of MassVOTE, a non-partisan organization devoted to reducing racial disparities in voting and civic participation in Massachusetts.

Q: What's at stake for Massachusetts with the 2020 Census?

Massachusetts has a significant number of hard-to-count areas. These include low-income communities with high percentages of people who've moved recently, communities with a number of people who are limited English proficient, and communities with large numbers of babies and really young children. When people don't get counted, state and municipal governments miss out on important funding.

Q: What were the lessons from the 2010 Census?

The most important thing we learned in the 2010 Census is that most people don't think very often

"We need to communicate about the Census early and often, and have as many nonprofits as possible build it into their communications."

about the Census. We need to communicate about the Census early and often. We need to have as many nonprofits as possible build it into their communications. So if you're a community health center, you can put a banner in the waiting room that says, "The Census is coming." If you're a grassroots neighborhood organization, you can have a discussion topic be, "What is the Census? How do we make sure that we all know what to do about the Census?" Or the next time you take literature around the neighborhood, you can include a flyer in the language that your clients speak saying, "This is the Census. Have everybody fill it out and submit it."

Q: Why should nonprofits across Massachusetts - particularly those that don't do civic engagement work - engage in the 2020 Census?

We're at a moment of robust and intense debate about what it means to be a member of a community in the United States. Unfortunately, some people are arguing that not all of us are valid members of American communities. Making sure that people sign up for the Census is a way to say that we're all here. We all matter. We all count. We are all human beings worthy of dignity and respect. To me, it doesn't matter what your specific organizational mission is. If we don't have a nation that accepts everyone in a community of tolerance, we're all harmed by that.

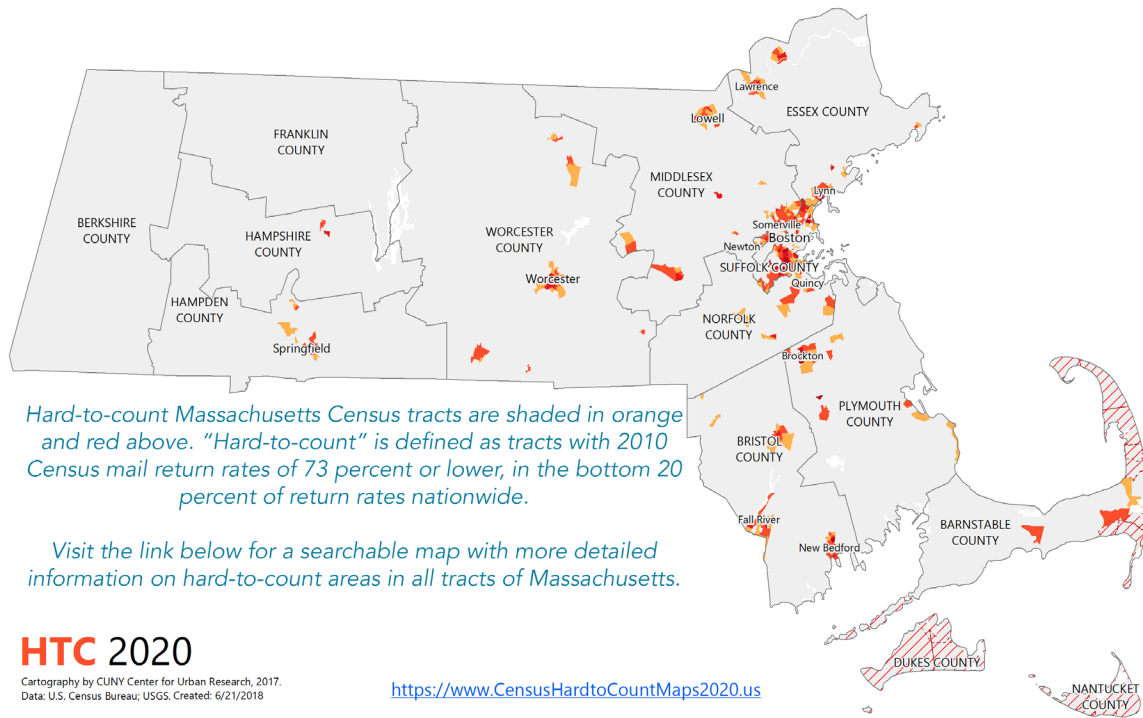


Massachusetts Census Equity Fund 2020

The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund 2020 is inviting funders to be part of a three-year project to promote an accurate count of all Massachusetts residents. The Fund has already created a learning community to educate residents, businesses, funders, nonprofits, and policymakers about the importance of the Census. The Fund will also host a grant allocation process that will target support to community-based organizations with strong plans for overcoming barriers to an accurate count.

To learn more and to get involved, contact Katie Campbell Simons, Project Consultant, at masscensusfund@accessstrategies.org.

CENSUS 2020 HARD-TO-COUNT COMMUNITIES IN MASSACHUSETTS



A Nonprofit Perspective

Brooke Mead

Executive Director, Berkshire Immigrant Center



Brooke Mead is the Executive Director of the Berkshire Immigrant Center. The Center helps immigrant and refugee individuals and families in Berkshire County make the economic, psychological, and cultural adjustments necessary to live in the United States.

Q: Why are immigrant communities considered to be "hard-to-count," and what do people need to know about immigrants' experiences?

Two main things: their fear related to immigration status, and their fear of government in general. There are 12 million people living without documentation in the United States. More than half of them live in mixed-status families, such as a family with

"An accurate Census count will support one of our key messages, that investing in immigrants is essential."

a U.S. citizen parent and an undocumented parent. There's a real fear that people who are undocumented are going to be picked up by federal immigration officials, and there's a protective desire to shield these members of families and communities. In addition, immigrants come from different countries and backgrounds, with a fair number of them coming from countries where governments are not exactly like ours. They are skeptical and afraid of the government, and unclear about what their role is in it. There's a lack of understanding about U.S. systems in general and a language barrier for some people. It's also been hammered into immigrants that they can't do things such as vote or receive certain types of public benefits.

Q: Does the Berkshire Immigrant Center plan to be involved with efforts for the 2020 Census?

As a director, I am going to be looking to and talking with my key allies and partners from around the state and country in making a decision on what the Center will say about the Census. Especially as it relates to the question on citizenship - if we thought that the information collected from a citizenship question could be unsafe, we would need to figure out what to do. Part of me says, "Yes, people need to be counted." An accurate Census count will support one of our key messages, that investing in immigrants is essential. If we can't prove there are enough immigrants in the Berkshires (even though I know there are), it would be harder to make that argument and it could mean less money and less assistance.

CALL TO ACTION:

How Can Nonprofits Engage in the 2020 Census?

- Think critically about the role your organization can play and how the Census relates to your mission.
- Add Census education and outreach into your public education and communications plans.
- Join collaborations already working on the Census, such as Complete Count Committees.
- Advocate for full funding of the Census and oppose the inclusion of a citizenship question.

A Funder Perspective

David Moy
Senior Program Officer, Hyams Foundation



David joined the Hyams Foundation in 2006. Before joining the Foundation, David served for 15 years as the Executive Director of the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

Q: Why is it important that funders get involved?

Right now policies are being implemented that will actually discourage an accurate count. If you are not counted, and therefore not recognized by our federal government, it is actually much easier for policymakers to ignore you. Funders need to figure out how to step up with communities that really care about having an accurate and robust count. Much of our federal representation in Congress and the appropriation of federal contributions to the state are dependent on it. The reality of it is that if you care about education, infrastructure, elderly services, or disability services - they all rely on getting an accurate count. If you are a foundation that cares about services and takes a charitable approach to your work, you need to support a robust count. Otherwise your grant dollars may quickly max out trying to replace what we may lose in federal appropriations because of an undercount.

Q: What should nonprofits be thinking about in terms of any connections between the Census and an individual nonprofit's mission?

Many nonprofits, including ones that provide services in communities, have a mission of helping individuals and families. Nonprofits need to realize that what they do is very reliant on an accurate count because the basis of their funding, in many cases, is dependent on the public sector. That could come from the city, or from the state, but ultimately much of it comes from the federal government. It will be difficult for nonprofits to realize their mission without having enough public resources, and the only way to ensure the resources is to make sure that everyone is participating to get an accurate count.

Conclusion

MNN has begun to work on the 2020 Census with leaders in the nonprofit, funder, and government communities. The Census is important to all of those communities and the people they serve. MNN encourages nonprofits, foundations, businesses, and residents of the Commonwealth, as well as local, state, and federal policymakers, to work collaboratively over the next two years to ensure that everyone in the Commonwealth is counted - and counts.

MNN thanks Mary Jo, Avi, Brooke, and David for sharing their time and wisdom for this edition of Commonwealth Insights.



2 Atlantic Ave., 1st Floor
Boston, MA 02110

About the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network

MNN brings together nonprofits, funders, business leaders, and elected officials to strengthen nonprofits and raise the sector's voice on critical issues. The network has more than 700 nonprofit member organizations and more than 100 for-profit affiliate partners across Massachusetts. To join visit massnonprofitnet.org/join.

This publication series is made possible by support from the Barr Foundation.

