

It's time. Make yourself count.

Census 2010



2010 Census: Guidelines for Community-Based Group Volunteers Promoting the Census

Community-based organizations can make a huge and long-lasting contribution to the communities they serve by helping to make sure that everyone is counted in the 2010 census.

The 2010 census includes a broad, inclusive Partnership Program designed to harness the reach and influence of national, state, and local organizations in support of the decennial population count. Partner organizations—including state and local governments; nonprofits; community-based groups and service providers; businesses and labor unions – pledge to help educate their constituencies and clients about the importance of the census and to encourage response, especially among historically hard-to-count populations.

The Census Bureau recognizes that its partners represent “trusted voices” that are better able than government officials to carry the messages of safety, confidentiality, and ease of participation to diverse communities across the country. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund urges community-based groups to work collaboratively with Census Bureau staff to facilitate a smooth and consistent enumeration process that adheres to legal and procedural protocols for collecting sensitive personal information.

As community-based organizations and their staffs and volunteer networks prepare to assist the Census Bureau through outreach and mobilization campaigns, the following information, guidelines, and suggestions should help ensure that messengers disbursing information play a constructive and appropriate role in encouraging census participation at the grassroots level.

Census Confidentiality

A key factor in convincing people to answer the census is the **strict confidentiality** provided by law. The Census Act (Title 13, U.S.C. §9, §214) prohibits the Census Bureau from sharing **any** personal information (including street addresses!) collected in preparation for or during the census with **any other entity** – not the courts; not federal, state, or local agencies; not the I.C.E., FBI, IRS, or DHS. Only **sworn census employees** have access to personally identifiable information, and they are subject (for life!) to penalties of up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for revealing information to anyone outside of the agency.

- *This legal restriction means that only sworn census employees should see personal responses on a census form.*

Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs)

The Census Bureau will open 30,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) across the country from February 26 - April 19, 2010. QACs can help people in hard-to-count communities understand the census and fill out their questionnaires. Community-based organizations can play a key role in this important activity and should consider applying to become an assistance center. Especially appropriate are accessible venues that have a high level of foot traffic in hard-to-count communities, such as churches, food pantries, and child care or after-school centers.

The QACs will have language assistance guides and *Be Counted* forms (in six languages, including English) for people who did not receive a questionnaire at their residence or believe they were left off the questionnaire filled out at their home. The Census Bureau will post on the Internet the location, days/hours, and language

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assistance offered for all QACs. Some QACs will be open 30+ hours a week (such as at a busy health clinic), while others might only be open five hours (for example, at a church).

Regional Census Centers will identify appropriate sites, such as health centers, service-delivery agencies, churches, and libraries, for the QACs. The Census Bureau will hire and pay all QAC staff and will consider hiring employees of the host organization. Language skills will be a consideration in the hiring decisions, to ensure the availability of bilingual assistance where appropriate. *QAC staff will be sworn-in and trained like all other census employees.*

- Community-based organizations that want to host a QAC should first apply to become an official 2010 Census Partner and then indicate their willingness to be a QAC site (<http://2010.census.gov/partners/partners/>).
- Host organization staff may apply for QAC Representative positions and will be considered through the normal hiring process. There generally will be one or two employees, hired by the Census Bureau, at each QAC.
- Other (non-sworn, non-trained) host organization staff should encourage clients to visit the QAC for assistance and may offer basic information about the importance, ease, and safety of participating in the census.
- The Census Bureau will **not** swear-in unpaid staffers (e.g. volunteers) to help people who visit the QACs.

Mobilizing Your Communities to Answer the Census

Many community-based organizations are planning activities to encourage census participation (either through the mail or, subsequently, through cooperation with door-to-door census takers) and to help residents fill out their census forms. The **do's** and **don'ts** below should help ensure a smooth working relationship with official Census Bureau staff and adherence to important confidentiality and procedural rules.

Assistance Activities

- **Do** visit faith institutions, community centers, schools, and the like to discuss the importance of the census, show people a sample census form, encourage them to mail their questionnaires back promptly, and answer general questions about the census process.
- **Don't** ask people to show you their completed census questionnaires.

Canvassing

- **Do** go door-to-door in familiar neighborhoods, encouraging residents to mail back their forms or cooperate with census takers. Convey the “safe, important, and easy” message. Explain how census takers will identify themselves if Non-Response Follow-Up has started.
- **Don't** follow census takers around the neighborhood or go door-to-door offering to help people fill out their forms.

Multi-unit Buildings

- **Do** work with local housing authorities, landlords, and tenant groups in advance, to encourage their help in ensuring building access for census takers.
- **Don't** follow census takers into multi-unit buildings to “help” with the enumeration. Let them do their job unfettered and in private!

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Group Events

- **Do** host “Answer the Census!” events, where you can show groups of people a sample census form and walk them through each question generally, offering in-language assistance where appropriate. Invite a sworn, trained Census Bureau employee to your event, to answer specific questions that involve conveying personal information. Collect completed, *sealed* census forms for immediate delivery to a post office, or walk to the post office as a group and send off the forms. (Postage is pre-paid!)
- **Don't** let volunteers at group events help individuals fill out their actual census forms with personally identifiable information.
- **Don't** use the official 2010 Census logo or claim official Census Bureau sponsorship for an event that is actually organized by a community group. It is important to distinguish between community organizations that are helping to promote an accurate census count and the Census Bureau itself. Keeping things clear will help prevent confusion, misunderstandings and mistrust.

Does your organization need additional suggestions for effective community-based activities to encourage full participation in the census? Contact the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund at census@civilrights.org and we will help guide your efforts.