

## Toward a Fair and Accurate Census 2020

### What Is Census 2020 and Why Does It Matter for New Jersey?

The census is a count of all United States residents required by The U.S. Constitution every 10 years to determine Congressional districts. The census is an essential policy tool. The federal government depends on census data to allocate resources, state governments use census data to draw legislative districts and to direct spending, and academics, nonprofits, and businesses rely on census data to inform and direct their work. Almost everything we know about our population and our communities comes from information collected during the decennial census and its related surveys.

Without an accurate count, New Jersey residents will lose resources and representation. When New Jersey residents are not counted, the state loses funding and influence. New Jersey receives more than **\$22.7 billion dollars each year** from federal assistance programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, transportation infrastructure, and special education and school breakfast funds – all amounts based on census counts. Further, New Jersey lost a Congressional seat in 2013 after losing another in 1993. New Jersey now has 12 congressional districts, the lowest number since 1933, which limits the state's impact on federal decisions.

**Too many New Jerseyans go uncoun**ted. When New Jerseyans are not counted, our communities are deprived of resources and representation. Further, **those (faulty) numbers will determine the next 10 years** of federal funding, federal redistricting, state redistricting, and state funding.

### How Does the Census Work?

The census form is a confidential household survey. The best and most accurate method to complete the survey is for households (people living at a single address) to complete the form in full. Unfortunately, in the past too many New Jerseyans have not been counted accurately. In the 2010 census, response rates for New Jersey's cities were very low: 55% in Newark, 59% in Trenton, 60% in Paterson, and 61% in Camden. These communities are among those labeled [Hard-to-Count \(HTC\)](#). If residents do not submit completed census forms, census workers go door-to-door to try to count people who did not return a survey. Many residents are reluctant to answer a knock from the government. When gathered this way, data are less reliable.

## **What Are the Census Challenges in the U.S. and in New Jersey?**

In 2020, most census forms will be on-line. Many in New Jersey do not have reliable internet access and may have problems completing the forms. Present heightened distrust of the federal government and concern about federal immigration policy and the formerly proposed “citizenship question” – which will NOT appear on the census form – are likely to discourage participation.

Importantly: some groups are more likely to be missed – especially immigrants, people of color, urban residents, children under 5, people living in multifamily housing, non-native English speakers, and people who are homeless. In contrast, wealthier white people are more likely to be double-counted.

## **How Can We Work Together to Improve the Census Count in New Jersey?**

Community leaders in the state must join together to support a complete count in 2020. When all residents in New Jersey are counted, everyone in the state will benefit.

Cities and counties should **form Complete Count Committees (CCCs)** that include government leaders and local representatives from schools, businesses, faith communities, nonprofits, civic groups, and libraries. A coordinated effort is needed to make sure everybody is counted. Local CCCs can teach residents about the importance of the census, encourage local hiring for Census Bureau jobs, provide technology assistance and neighborhood “Get Counted” centers where people can access computers or tablets to complete their census forms, and spread the messages to encourage all residents to participate in a complete count.

Nonprofits and other civic anchors such as schools and medical centers can educate and mobilize their communities, establish or join local Complete Count Committees, host job fairs, equip outreach staff with accurate information about Census 2020, and serve as “Get Counted” centers. Business leaders should emphasize the importance of the census to the community’s well-being, and should offer places to “get counted.”

**All sectors should work together to support a fair and accurate census.**

## **What Difference Can This Make?**

A more complete count can generate more federal resources and more influence for New Jersey. In 2010, states that invested in census outreach in HTC areas increased the number of responses compared with the previous census, which benefitted all state residents. Further, census work supports democracy by increasing civic engagement and public awareness. **The time to begin is NOW.**

## **For more information and assistance**

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