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## THE 2020 CENSUS

The Census is a count of the population in the United States, regardless of citizenship or immigration status. As required by the Constitution, every 10 years the United States Census Bureau is charged with counting all people living in the United States and recording basic information such as age, sex, and race. **The next Census will begin in Mid-March of 2020.**

## WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Data from the Census is used to:

- **Apportion the 435 seats** of the U.S. House of Representatives (NYS lost 2 congressional seats after the 2010 Census results);
- **Realign and redistrict the boundaries of legislative districts** within each state; and
- **Allocate about \$800 billion dollars in federal funds** to states, localities, and families every year for health care, education, housing, transportation, and other critical services.

## CONCERNS ABOUT THE CENSUS

Preparing for the 2020 Census has caused a great deal of concern because:

- The federal government added a question about each respondent's citizenship without following the proper vetting system the Census Bureau has in place to prepare for each Census cycle;
- Funding for Census work has not kept up with inflation, therefore limiting the number of Census employees that will be placed across the country to support enumeration processes; and
- The majority of Census responses are meant to be collected online, replacing thousands of temporary Census workers and significantly decreasing the number of canvassers engaging hard-to-count communities that have limited technology accessibility.

## THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

The unprecedented addition of the citizenship question to the Census form is likely going to discourage New

Yorkers from completing the Census. In fact, the Federal Census Bureau's own Census Scientific Advisory Committee (CSAC) officially stated their opposition to the last-minute inclusion of the citizenship question on the 2020 Census for this reason. In their Spring 2018 Memo, CSAC raised concerns about the lack of adequate testing of the question, the impact it would have on response rates, the cost of funding in-person follow-ups, and expressed skepticism about the Census Bureau's commitment to data confidentiality.

The last time a citizenship question appeared on a Census survey was in 1950. The Census Bureau removed the citizenship question in 1960 in part because innovations in survey methods revealed a more accurate and less burdensome way of counting the country's non-citizen population. It is abundantly clear that the only reason the current federal administration would include such a question is to intimidate immigrant communities from participating in our national Census—and the result could be an undercount of New York City's residents that would hurt all New Yorkers and indeed, all Americans.

## RISKS OF AN UNDERCOUNT

The 2010 Census declared New York City's population to be 8,175,133 people, which city officials immediately said was an undercount of about 2.6% of the city, or 225,000 people.

Even without a question about citizenship status, in-person follow-up still undercounted immigrant-heavy communities (such as southern Brooklyn and northern Queens) due to people living in unrecognized subdivided and basement apartments. As a result of nonresponses to both the mail and in-person efforts, the Census Bureau marked many buildings in the City as vacant.

Many nonprofit organizations have reported that their community members are skeptical about the Census

out of fear that government agencies outside of the Census Bureau will access their information. Despite these concerns, federal law currently prohibits the disclosure of any private information that identifies an individual or business, and personal information cannot be used against an individual by any government agency or court. Violating this law is a federal crime carrying penalties including federal prison and a fine up to \$250,000, or both.

## SETTLEMENT HOUSES CAN REACH HARD-TO-COUNT COMMUNITIES

Certain populations – referred to as “hard-to-count” – are at a higher risk of not being fully counted. Settlement houses are part of many of these communities and have direct access to hard-to-count neighborhoods. To encourage higher levels of participation in the Census among hard-to-count communities, settlement houses should:

- **Raise awareness** among staff and community members about the importance of the Census and the need for local participation to ensure a successful count. Educate people about how the Census works, the importance of accuracy, confidentiality, and the benefits of a complete count;
- **Develop an organizational plan** for promoting the Census and motivating participation in the community. Hold regular meetings to report on tasks and other activities; and
- **Provide educational and technological support** to community members that are unlikely to respond to the Census by promoting activities that highlight the message that 2020 Census participation is easy, important and safe. An effective strategy would guarantee that community residents encounter Census messages during any given interaction with their settlement house.

## CALL TO ACTION

As trusted community institutions, settlement houses can have a significant impact on the 2020 Census. UNH’s 39 NYC-based settlement houses operate more

than 650 program sites throughout the five boroughs, reaching 750,000 residents annually. By working together, we can help ensure that New Yorkers understand the importance of being counted.

**Submit a public comment** on the addition of the citizenship question. The Census Bureau published a notice on June 8<sup>th</sup> that provides for public comment on the citizenship question. The 60-day comment period (due by August 7, 2018) provides an opportunity to establish a strong, clear public record from a range of stakeholders who oppose addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census.

See [bit.ly/Census2020PublicComment](http://bit.ly/Census2020PublicComment)

## RESOURCES

UNH has joined **New York Counts 2020**, a broad-based, statewide coalition composed of racial, ethnic, immigrant, religious, health, education, labor, housing, social services, and business groups working in partnership with state and local government officials. Together, these stakeholders will share strategies and resources to promote high levels of participation in the 2020 Census. While UNH will share additional information with you as it becomes available, individual settlement houses may also wish to join the coalition directly. Link here: [www.newyorkcounts2020.org](http://www.newyorkcounts2020.org).

UNH will share documents and organizing strategies to:

- Build organizational commitment on the issue;
- Organize a Census workgroup representing the diversity (populations, programs and locations) of your settlement house; and
- Identify and target the populations you want to reach and create a plan

A fair and accurate Census is essential for all basic functions of our society. New York can only succeed when all its residents do, and an equitable share of federal dollars is paramount to building that success. Working together, we can prevent an undercount in New York City by focusing our energy on planning an efficient, well-resourced and representative count of our City’s vibrant and diverse communities.

Contact Lena Cohen, Civic Engagement Associate ([lcohen@unhny.org](mailto:lcohen@unhny.org)) for more information.