

Civil rights leaders encourage diverse California communities to “sanitize and self-respond”

In the time of Coronavirus, the state’s diverse communities are told that participation in the U.S. Census is still crucially important, aside from safe and secure

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The U.S. Census self-response phase went live on March 12, and civil rights leaders of diverse ethnic groups came together to remind their communities of the many legal and privacy protections guaranteed by federal law for people to participate in the decennial count.

They also encouraged them to continue to “self-respond” by phone, online or mail and outlined the steps they will follow to continue to reach out to hard-to-count communities, addressing at the same time the health emergency of the Covid-19 as an additional challenge in Census 2020.

“We encourage our communities to sanitize and self-respond”, said Jeri Green, 2020 Census Senior Advisor for the National Urban League.

The leaders emphasized that most Americans are now able to self-respond to the Census in the privacy of their own homes without having to meet a Census taker or enumerator. For example, people can go to <https://2020census.gov/> and answer nine questions (seven for every person in the household other than the one filling out the questionnaire). They can also respond by phone or in printed form. Several organizations have mounted massive campaigns to help their communities maximize their participation, given that the data collected by the US Census is used in the distribution of resources, funding of services and political representation through drawing of districts for Congress, State Legislatures, etc.

Beth Lynk, Census counts campaign Director for The Leadership Conference Education Fund said the Census is “one of the most urgent civil rights issues facing the country and right now every person in the US has a chance to ensure a fair and complete count to all communities”.

Knowing that many in their communities have privacy concerns on the use of the data they will be sharing with the Census, the leaders reminded that the information has extraordinary levels of legal protection.

John Yang, president and executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice pointed to the laws that govern the use of the data given to the U.S. Census Bureau as “the strongest privacy protections allowed in the United States”. Asian Americans are among the communities where there are many undocumented immigrants and mixed-status households, which creates mistrust towards the government and could affect a complete count. Every person living in the United States by April 1 must be counted, and that includes undocumented immigrants.

“The confidentiality provision known as Title 13 prevents the government from using the Census data for any purpose other than the statistical one”, said Yang. “More importantly, the bureau and its employees are not allowed to share the data with any other government agency or officials for any reason”. Certain information gathered by the Census cannot be published for 72 years, such as the name of the individual, business or organization, address or telephone number. Another layer of laws prohibits the use of data in any way against the individual who responded.

Yang pointed to their hotline for the Asian and Pacific Islander Community in several languages as a crucial resource to answer questions: 844-2020-API or 844-202-0204.

Other communities share the same privacy concern. This is a very important issue in black communities, said Green, of the Urban League, whose 90 affiliates are hard at work reassuring their members of the security of the data and the importance of participation.

“We are fighting to ensure that the black population, including immigrants, lose no ground, be it economic, political or in civil rights”, she emphasized. “The stakes are too high, please go to [makeblackcount.org](https://www.makeblackcount.org) to learn more about our efforts”.

Lycia Maddox, Vice President of External Affairs for the National Congress of American Indians (which also includes Alaska Natives) said that the tribal nations across the country present a special challenge due to restrictions they have imposed on access to their lands, due to the Coronavirus.

“These communities often have no access to online and broadband to self-respond, and these new security measures make it impossible for enumerators to visit them and it delays mail delivery”, Maddox said. “We are as we speak working with different networks to come up with plans, and to increase community outreach and advertising”.

Lizette Escobedo, Census Director for the National Association of Latino and Elected Officials (NALEO) invited Latinos to call the bilingual Spanish-English hotline 877 ELCENSO or 877 352-3672 where there will be live paid operator answering questions and watching for reports of potential scammers or disinformation. The organization has trained 3500 Census Ambassadors to assist the community in 15 states in filling out the Census and has launched two national campaigns, “Hágase contar and Hazme contar” focused on the larger Latino community and children younger than four, which experienced a large undercount in the 2010 Census.

Additional paid media campaigns will remind people that there is absolutely “NO CITIZENSHIP QUESTION” in the Census and addressing “fears of data privacy and cybersecurity”. An additional ad campaign targeting Latina Millennials who are English-dominant was launched 2 months ago.

“Ensuring an accurate count seems like a heavier lift as every day happens folks have mentioned, we are committed to working with national local and media partners to do what we can to ensure that Latinos are heard, seen and counted this 2020 census”, she added.

In the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, organizations are revising the way they conduct the outreach to maintain community safety, “Several grassroots organizations are moving to phone banks and text banks because the table

opportunities are very restrictive right now and we want to exercise caution”, said Yang. “We are also leaving drop off literature in supermarkets, community centers, and clinics”.

Ditas Katague, from the California Complete count office, said that the state of California has spent more than all the other states combined to reach out to the hardest to count populations and ensure everyone participates.

“The investment is unprecedented, a total of 172.2 million dollars and is larger than all other states combined, we are on a league of our own”, said Katague. “We have unique challenges, a diverse population, and a large geographic size. We have 120 partners throughout the state and we are coordinating the largest mobilization of partners in our state’s history”.

The leaders reiterated that their overall goal is that every Californian understands that the Census is not only “safe and secure”, and vital for the future of all the communities. “The goal is to ensure that everyone is invited and able to participate in the 2020 Census”, said Beth Lynk of the Leadership Conference.