

Census Data and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

(drafted by AAJC with input from NALEO & AAI)

I. Overview of Importance of Census data to NGOs

Accurate census data is vital to the everyday activities of NGOs at all levels of the organization. NGOs use census data for internal functions such as planning service delivery, setting priorities, informing policy decisions and supporting their fundraising efforts. NGOs also use the data for external functions such as educating their stakeholders and working with media, corporations, government officials and other institutional leaders on issues of interest.

Many NGOs are particularly concerned with data relating to the populations the Census Bureau finds the hardest to count accurately, because they are often the most vulnerable in our country. Since census data can expose the difficulties experienced by a particular community – such as low levels of educational attainment, large numbers of people living in poverty, large numbers of people with limited English proficiency, and large numbers of people who have not become U.S. citizens – NGOs use it to determine which issues, programs and services to focus their limited resources. Census data is often the backbone behind many of the materials developed by NGOs, such as organizational reports, brochures, statements made at hearings, testimonies, and other public documents. While other data sources exist and are utilized, census data remains the most important because it provides the most statistically sound and detailed data on many different populations in the country.

While the American Community Survey is replacing the long form, the information in the Decennial Census remains critical to redistricting, as well as the enforcement of a myriad of civil rights laws, including the Voting Rights Act. Minority populations protected by the Voting Rights Act and other anti-discrimination laws are among the communities most difficult to count. NGOs who work with these populations have a strong stake in an accurate count.

II. Census 2000 Experience – a Recap: Opportunities and Obstacles: NGOs

In 1990, the US Census Bureau conducted its decennial count of individuals residing in the United States. The Census Bureau learned from the 1990 effort and undertook a variety of new tools and initiatives to improve the count in Census 2000. Utilizing outreach initiatives in collaboration with national community education outreach projects by many community based organizations (CBOs)¹, the Census Bureau was able to improve the accuracy of its count of the American population. While the Census still disproportionately undercounted racial and ethnic minorities, children, and immigrants, the undercount of racial and ethnic minorities decreased from the prior census.

The 2000 census partnership and outreach program was credited by many in the civil rights community and Census Bureau for helping achieve one of the most accurate counts for many of our hard to count communities. The Community Partnership Specialists were an important innovation for Census 2000, but the program's quality varied significantly across regions. Specialists were not always hired early enough and were sometimes not provided adequate training. Additionally, not enough specialists were hired to cover the various

¹ CBOs and NGOs are used interchangeably in this document.

communities in any given region. Finally, regional and local offices did not make consistent efforts to reach out to leaders in different communities. For example, in many of the areas, the Community Partnership Specialists did not meet with all of the various Asian American groups, resulting in overly generic outreach plans that were not appropriately tailored to specific ethnic and neighborhood communities. This problem also played out in the advertising campaign whereby the Bureau's paid advertising campaign did not reach the ethnic groups who needed in-language media the most.

For Census 2000, the Census Bureau implemented a more aggressive language outreach program that included translating census materials into a variety of languages, toll-free phone assistance and questionnaire assistance centers. The translation of the questionnaire into five non-English languages and the creation of Language Assistance Guides in 49 different languages were critical to reaching limited English proficient respondents. There were also translated forms in a limited number of languages; however, the envelope containing the advance letter noting the existing of the translated forms was only in English.

The language outreach program could have been more effective in several areas. The Bureau was late in making critical decisions on the translated materials and there was no centralized clearinghouse of translated materials so that regional offices and NGOs could share them on a local level. The language assistance guides, toll-free phone assistance, and questionnaire assistance centers did not always effectively reach members of the LEP community due to the lack of sufficient publicity and coordination with community-based groups. The advertising campaign was not well coordinated with the outreach campaign. The Census Bureau did not appear to have coherent national or regional publicity plans to inform limited English proficient households about the existence or location of the various language assistance alternatives. Many community leaders were unaware of what was available or were not told where to access them.

The Census Bureau also invested in a significant advertising campaign. The advertising included campaigns targeting hard-to-count communities as well as general market advertising. The paid advertising was critical to improving the mail-back and the follow-up responses. While the advisory committee had input into the outreach campaign, it had less information about the advertising campaign which was being handled by a separate team. As a result, the slogan chosen for the advertising campaign used a concept that was clever in English but did not translate well into many of the languages. As a result, some of the CBOs had to choose different slogans that would make sense in the various languages for their communities.

In advertising, it is important to have as much consistency as possible to increase the effectiveness of the message and to reduce potential confusion inherent in the use of more than one slogan. There is a possibility for much greater leverage and synergy by incorporating involvement of the CBO community in the advertising and outreach campaign. Advertising research needs to be done in the targeted language as well as in English where possible.

CBO input into the choice of images for posters and print is also important, given the diversity of the hard-to-count communities. Such input in the 2000 Census effort helped to avoid costly mistakes. Input for 2010 should be formalized and occur earlier in the process.

Finally, funding for advertising was prioritized based on the size of the targeted populations, even though some of the populations were actually more difficult to reach because of the number of languages and diversity within them.

It also took too long to develop a protocol and make available images and video footage that could be incorporated into major campaigns run by CBOs working in close partnership with the Census Bureau.

Other proactive steps taken by the Census Bureau to assist the response rates of the census included issuing policy encouraging the hiring of non-citizens to meet the need for bilingual personnel. The Bureau also worked with the then-Immigration and Naturalization Service to get a commitment to limit immigration enforcement activity during the census. Both national and local CBOs helped the Census Bureau recruit people from hard-to-count communities to work for the Census Bureau and also worked with the Census Bureau, INS, and the Department of Justice to ensure that immigrants did not believe the count was somehow tied to ongoing raids.

Unfortunately, in both cases the policy guidance came out too late to be helpful and were arbitrarily applied. This highlighted one of the problems prevalent during Census 2000: the insufficient coordination between the national headquarters in Washington and regional and local offices. This led to some regional offices not fully understanding official Census Bureau policy, which resulted in inconsistent or inaccurate application of policies across regions. It caused confusion in the community over policies covering the hiring of noncitizens and the publicity of language assistance options.

III. Census 2010 Outlook: Emerging Needs and Challenges: NGOs

While the ideal goal of a census is to achieve a complete count of all persons in the country, perfection in this context is impossible. The pragmatic reality is that the Census Bureau constantly strives to achieve the most accurate count possible and one that is better than counts achieved previously. The 2010 census will provide the Census Bureau with even more challenges in achieving an accurate count.

The demographics of 2010 have changed drastically from 2000. Some communities, such as the Latino American and Asian American communities, have experienced high growth rates and increased diversity in terms of ethnicity and national origin. There has been an increase in African and Caribbean immigrants, as well as continued immigration from European and Middle Eastern countries. There is an even greater need to address the language barriers experienced by various respondents.

Since Census 2000, the country has been through the 9/11 attacks and subsequent concerns over privacy. In addition, anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration enforcement through high profile raids has increased exponentially. The Census Bureau has to address the fact that people are reluctant to voluntarily provide personal information to the government in an age of identity theft and dragnets that post-9/11 policies have created. Combined with the growing privacy concerns that have arisen from recent disclosures that the Census Bureau has inappropriately shared information with government agencies, an increasing number of people, particularly minorities, are fearful of providing even the most basic of information for the census.

The Census Bureau must partner with CBOs to overcome the many obstacles created by these factors in order to get an accurate count.

There are generally high levels of mobility for many ethnic minority communities, as they move from state to state, city to city. Additionally, recent natural disasters have displaced many people from their homes and have created a more complex, less static sense of household for many people. The Census Bureau must be able to understand these communities and the unique barriers to an accurate count that may exist for them.

The language program and outreach program for hard-to-count communities need to be deeper and broader to ensure that the Census Bureau achieves as accurate a count as possible in 2010.

IV. Supporting the 2010 Census – How NGOs Can Help

NGOs can run a complimentary outreach and educational campaign along side the Bureau's efforts. For example, in Census 2000, the Bureau's outreach plan could not address the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of the more than 45 Asian and Pacific Islander groups that speak over 50 languages. To ensure that Asian Americans would be accurately counted, AAJC launched a national community education outreach project that made materials available in 17 Asian and Pacific Islander languages and provided technical assistance and briefings in 19 cities. Many other national and local NGOs such as NALEO, NAACP and MALDEF launched similar community education outreach projects to supplement what the Bureau was doing through its partnership and outreach program.

NGOs can also advise the Census Bureau on a multitude of issues related to outreach and advertising. As discussed above, it is particularly important to have NGO input on the slogan, print and ad campaigns targeted to the diverse hard-to-count groups. There needs to be a mechanism between meetings of the advisory councils for timely input.

NGOs can also act as a liaison to local community and elected leaders for the Census Bureau. This is important, as the NGOs have preexisting relationships with local leaders and have gained a trust that the federal government through its agent the Census Bureau often does not have. These relationships can assist the Bureau in determining the cultural and language barriers in any given area and connect the Bureau's Community Specialists with leaders in the various communities. Because NGOs have a sense of what is happening on the ground, they can advise the Census Bureau on policies that impact its ability to accurately count persons. NGOs can also identify community events and help the Census Bureau leverage its paid media campaign with earned media on the local level. Also, NGOs may have connections to bilingual persons who can assist in reviewing translated materials, both for accuracy of translations as well as appropriateness of reading level.

NGOs can also leverage the paid advertising and outreach campaigns with community led national and local campaigns as was done for Census 2000. MALDEF and NALEO led efforts in the Latino community, while AAJC led efforts in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities on a national level. These national efforts also enlisted local groups who in turn helped to lead local campaigns, such as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern

California, an AAJC affiliate who led a California state wide outreach campaign to Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Finally, NGOs can educate lawmakers about the importance of fully funding the Census Bureau and its activities at the federal, state and local levels. Because of the unique nature of funding census activities and the dearth of knowledge about the Census Bureau among many lawmakers, it is vital for NGOs to educate lawmakers about the importance of fully funding the Census Bureau to their constituents as well as the importance of not raiding Census Bureau funding to fund other programs. NGOs can speak with a multitude of different voices that show the diversity of those who benefit from an accurate census count.

NGOs can lead similar education efforts with foundations and with local and state elected officials and other institutions to invest additional resources to compliment and leverage the federal resources.

V. How the Census Bureau Can Help NGOs Increase Census Participation

An important aspect of outreaching to hard-to-count communities is addressing the cultural and linguistic barriers that exist. Establishing partnerships with hard-to-count communities has been shown to reduce non-response follow-up costs by breaking down these barriers and improving accuracy. Many NGOs credit the 2000 census partnership and outreach program for helping to achieve the most accurate count to date for many of our hard-to-count communities.

Because advance planning is necessary to implement an effective partnership and outreach program, the Bureau must begin today to implement its partnership and outreach program in Fiscal Year 08. Time is needed for the Census Bureau to do the outreach to the organizations, as well as reach out to local governments and engage them in these efforts. Time is also needed for the NGOs, schools, churches and other partner groups to gear up for their outreach campaign to their constituents. These partner groups need to raise funds from local philanthropists and other sources to do the outreach work. Advance planning is particularly important for minority communities to adequately provide necessary outreach to its constituents. Inadequate partnership and outreach programs will result in high and differential undercounts. Waiting until 2009 to begin implementing the partnership program will jeopardize the overall count, as well as severely undermine minority counts.

An integral part of the outreach program is a strong and vibrant language outreach component. Lack of English fluency is a real barrier in getting many limited English proficient persons to fill out their surveys. The Census Bureau's own focus group research found that Asian Americans believed that lack of in-language questionnaires and lack of English-language fluency were the major barriers to greater participation in the census among the Asian American communities. The focus group research also noted that some in the Arab American community are not comfortable enough speaking or reading English to complete the census forms. Planning must begin now. The Bureau needs to have enough time to recruit non-response follow up interviewers and bilingual operators to man telephone assistance and develop a translated glossary of terms. Considering the amount of work involved in the development of appropriate materials for promotion and outreach (leaflets, posters, other promotional materials) and questionnaire aids in different languages, the Census Bureau needs to start the process today.

Two key factors for a successful language outreach program are consistency and timeliness. The translations must be consistent across the board and speak with the same voice and promote the same message. Confusion created by poor translations will create more work for both the Bureau and the NGOs on the back end as they try to work with respondents in filling out their questionnaires.

It is important to have a glossary of census related terms for each language that has been fully vetted by communities and experts in advance of their distribution. For some languages, a comparable term may not exist. For others, there may be a variety of possible translations, some being more appropriate than others. These glossaries need to be completed early and widely disseminated so that NGOs and others generating education materials are using consistent terms.

The translated materials must be completed, publicized and disbursed in a timely fashion. In some cases in 2000, regions ran out of the most relevant language materials. If the Bureau is late in making critical decisions on the translations materials and there is no centralized clearinghouse for them, then they will be ineffective in helping NGOs increase participation.

The Census Bureau must also begin thinking about the language component of its paid advertising campaign so as not to be ineffective in reaching the hard-to-count communities. For example, during the 2000 Census, AAJC heard from local NGOs that the Census Bureau's innovative advertising campaign did not reach many ethnic groups who needed in-language media the most. The 2000 campaign targeted the Asian American groups with the highest number of LEP individuals, but not the smaller ethnic groups who have the highest rates of limited English proficiency and linguistically isolated households. With a limited budget, the advertising campaign failed to cover an adequate number of Asian languages and cultures, and the advertising agency was forced to make generalizations based on sometimes inadequate research. Proper funding and planning must begin today to ensure that the advertising campaign and the partnership program increase participation of hard-to-count persons.

The Census Bureau should continue its successful approaches from 2000, as well as experiment with new tools for 2010. It will be important for the Census Bureau to locally recruit temporary workers who are "indigenous" to the communities in which they will be working. The Census Bureau should work with OPM to get another waiver of the citizenship requirement for temporary workers for the census. This helps the Census Bureau ensure that the person knocking on the door for the 2010 Census will speak the same language as the person answering the door.

The Census Bureau must also begin planning how it will work with the U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement ("ICE") to limit their enforcement activity during the 2010 Census process. Despite a commitment to limit activity during the census, enforcement efforts by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), ICE's predecessor, may have caused many immigrants to avoid participating in Census 2000. The INS was slow to come out with guidance to its regional offices concerning enforcement during the census, resulting in raids in Arizona, Oklahoma, Washington State and Texas. Many immigrants who were initially convinced that they could safely participate in the census were frightened off by the raids. Having these policies in place sooner rather than later will help NGOs in their efforts to convince people to participate in the census. However, because the current ICE/USCIS/DHS team will not be in place during

the 2010 Census, it may be more effective for the Bureau to work with ICE to minimize raids immediately after the new Administration takes office in January 2009 rather than expending resources and efforts now.

Finally, we saw in Census 2000 that the count proved to be more accurate where resources for NGOs were available to support census outreach activities. It is imperative that Congress includes early funding in the Census budget for allocation to states for NGO initiatives. For example, in California where state and local government, as well as foundation resources, were made available to NGOs, the outreach and count went more smoothly in hard-to-count neighborhoods than in New York where there were no additional government resources. Unfortunately, few states and cities made support available, and those that did, were very late doing so. As a result, already overloaded NGOs had to depend on discretionary funds from regional Census Bureau offices or on private funding. It is important for the Census Bureau to plan and budget for NGOs who are assisting the Bureau with its outreach.