

# Developing an Integrated Communications Strategy

## Select Topics in International Censuses<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

This Select Topics in International Censuses (STIC) technical note provides national statistical offices (NSOs) with information on how to develop an integrated communications strategy that delivers a resonating message and improves the quality of the census.

NSOs engage in publicity activities to manage the perception of the organization, its activities, and its mission. For censuses especially, publicity campaigns are a key component for success. An effective communications strategy delivers tailored messaging to audience segments using media and trusted voices.

NSOs can justify the expenditure of resources on publicity campaigns using two primary arguments:

1. **Data Quality:** Data are most accurate at the point of capture. A publicity campaign encourages people to open their doors for enumerators and promotes understanding of the content and purpose of the census. Encouragement can include educating the public about the benefits of a census and reminding respondents that participation is a legal obligation.
2. **Cost:** Increased understanding and receptiveness to the census-taking process reduces the time per interview and nonresponse. In addition, and when applicable, publicity can encourage the adoption of lower-cost capture modes, such as a computerized self-administered questionnaire (CSAQ).

This technical note is not a comprehensive publicity guide. Topics not covered include the data users' conference, slogans, logos, internal and intragovernmental communications, and dissemination product promotion. These important topics are covered in the United Nations' *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (2015).

### STRATEGIZING THE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

Key components of the integrated communication strategy include audience segmentation, tailored messaging, and touchpoints. Understanding and implementing each of these components will increase the effectiveness of the overall strategy.

#### Audience Segmentation

The first step toward the creation of an integrated strategy is to segment and better understand the audience. The characteristics used to segment an audience will vary between countries, but may include demographics, geography, attitudes, needs, motivations, and previous engagement with or response to government programs. A quantitative approach to audience segmentation is preferred, but the process can also be applied through qualitative consideration of the subgroups found in a population.

For the U.S. 2010 Census, the population was segmented using mail-back response rates from Census 2000 combined with demographic, housing, and socioeconomic characteristics associated with high response rates. Eight clusters were identified and each census tract (small,

<sup>1</sup> This technical note is one in a series of "Select Topics in International Censuses" exploring matters of interest to the international statistical community. The U.S. Census Bureau helps countries improve their national statistical systems by engaging in capacity building to enhance statistical competencies in sustainable ways.

relatively permanent statistical subdivisions) was assigned to a cluster. Intercensal survey data for the grouped tracts were used to develop profiles for each cluster. The most effective strategies to reach these segments with a positive message about the census were then developed. Figure 1 (next page) provides an example using four of the 2010 audience segment clusters.

**Audience segments** reflect the diversity of the U.S. population and strengthen the ability of census managers to reach everyone with an effective message. An audience segment reflects a relatively homogenous group with similar demographics, motivations, and media usage characteristics.

The demographics in the first column provide insight into the needs and motivations of the average respondent. For example, are children likely to be present in the household belonging to this household segment? In which government programs might the average member of this cluster have an interest? Which language(s) offer the best chance of reaching a typical member of this cluster?

The percentage racial composition for each cluster is shown in Column 2 of Figure 1. Racial composition may suggest potential partner organizations for outreach efforts. Column 3 shows the type of media toward which a person matching the demographic profile of cluster skews, if any. The characterization of media preferences was based on a commonly used report on media use habits for subgroups of the U.S. population.

The availability of intercensal survey data and data on patterns of media usage were key components in developing this segmentation. These data and the technical skills used in this study may not be available to every NSO. However, NSO subject matter specialists may still be able to sort the national population into more homogenous groups. The characteristics used to segment the population vary by country and are influenced by the economic, linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups found in each. Consider the

following characteristics and how they could be grouped to represent segments of the population:

- Rural or urban residents
- Residents of formal or informal housing
- Participants in the formal or informal economy
- Fully literate, semi-literate, and illiterate groups
- Speakers of minority languages
- Recent internal or international migrants
- Remotely situated or nomadic populations

Some segments may be designated as hard-to-count (HTC).

**Hard-to-count** populations face physical, economic, social, and cultural barriers to participation in the census and require careful consideration as part of a successful communications strategy.

These segments have a greater number of people living in households where a real or perceived barrier to inclusion in the data collection process exists. For the U.S. 2010 Census, these people included renters, isolated speakers of a language other than English, the unemployed, people living below the poverty line, those lacking a high school diploma, recipients of public assistance, recent movers, residents of multi-family houses, members of non-husband-wife households, and those living in households without telephones.

Consider which characteristics particular to your country may make a segment HTC. While it is important to encourage census participation by the population at large, it may be appropriate to expend more resources reaching hard-to-count segments. A HTC designation can be used to mark a segment for special attention when buying paid media or conducting outreach efforts.

Figure 1.

**Example of Four Audience Segments Identified During the U.S. 2010 Census as Part of the Integrated Communications Strategy**

	<b>Characteristics<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Racial\Ethnic Composition<sup>2</sup> (%)</b>	<b>Media Preferences</b>
<b>Advantaged Homeowners</b>	27.9% of occupied housing units Highest mail return rate/lowest HTC 2000 Stable, married homeowners Least densely populated Higher education 39% with children under age 18	White, non-Hispanic, alone 84.2 Black, alone 5.1 Hispanic* 5.7 Asian, alone 3.9 AIAN, alone or in combination** 0.8 NHPI, alone*** 0.1 Other, non-Hispanic**** 0.9	More TV, Internet, magazines and lifestyle outdoor (mall advertising)
<b>All Around Average II</b>	15.5% of occupied housing units Mail return rate high/average HTC 2000 Skews renter/densely populated Urban Younger skew	White, non-Hispanic, alone 70.2 Black, alone 11.9 Hispanic 11.1 Asian, alone 4.8 AIAN, alone or in combination 1.4 NHPI, alone 0.2 Other, non-Hispanic 1.4	Slightly heavier users of most mass media including Internet
<b>Ethnic Enclave I</b>	3.3% of occupied housing units Above average crowding, poverty, public assistance, unemployment, and low education Less urban & densely populated, skews homeowner, stable & married 50% with children under age 18 43% foreign born 58% of households speak Spanish at home	White, non-Hispanic, alone 25.7 Black, alone 7.6 Hispanic 59.9 Asian, alone 4.6 AIAN, alone or in combination 2.4 NHPI, alone 0.2 Other, non-Hispanic 1.0	More in-culture TV, newspaper, radio, and outdoor
<b>Economically Disadvantaged II</b>	2.6% of occupied housing units Lowest mail return rate/highest HTC 2000 Skews renters (80%) in urban multi-units Highest poverty, public assistance, unemployment 1/3 HH speak language other than English 40% live alone Highest percent of single moms 35% with children under age 18	White, non-Hispanic, alone 24.9 Black, alone 47.9 Hispanic 22.9 Asian, alone 3.3 AIAN, alone or in combination 1.4 NHPI, alone 0.1 Other, non-Hispanic 1.8	Heavier users of broadcast media

\*Hispanics can be of any race, \*\*American Indian or Alaska Native, \*\*\* Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,

\*\*\*\*Includes Some Other Race alone and Two or More Races.

<sup>1</sup>HTC score, mail return rate, density, crowding from Census 2000 data; housing unit and all other information from 2006 ACS.

<sup>2</sup>Race/ethnicity composition and percentages based on 2006 ACS data; the race and ethnic groups shown reflect customized categories used to determine the composition of each cluster.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 Census Integrated Communications Campaign Plan*, August 2008.

## Tailored Messaging

Once an audience is segmented, the next step in developing an integrated communications strategy is to develop targeted messaging. The development of a slogan that captures the central message of the census is an established part of publicity campaigns. Tailored messaging increases the effectiveness of the slogan by addressing the anticipated concerns of an audience segment.

For the U.S. 2010 Census, the slogan was “It’s in Our Hands.” However, the exact meaning of “It’s” varied in materials targeted toward different audience segments. Figure 2 shows examples of how a central message can be tailored to appeal to audience segments.

Figure 2.  
**Examples of Message Tailoring**

Segment	Tailored Message	Segment	Tailored Message
<b>Advantaged Homeowners</b>	Highlight broad-based benefits to local area; emergency responses and infrastructure	<b>Ethnic Enclave I</b>	Emphasis on benefits around family and children and on getting “fair share” of resources to support community
<b>All Around Average II</b>	Highlight broad-based focus on community benefits, infrastructure and education	<b>Economically Disadvantaged II</b>	Participation ensures continued access to safety net spending and support programs

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

When tailoring the census message, consider the following questions:

1. Which government programs and services might this segment value?
2. What could motivate a member of this segment to participate in the census? Some possibilities are:
  - a. Sense of community: “I want to make sure that my community has all of the resources it needs to thrive.”
  - b. Self-interest: “I want the roads in my area to be maintained using resources from the central government.”
  - c. Willingness to help others: “I want to help my neighbors in this area be recognized.”
  - d. Concern for children: “I want better schools and libraries for my children.”

## Touchpoints

After segmenting the audience and tailoring messaging that resonates with each segment, the next step is to identify the means to deliver that message to the various audience segments. A useful concept when considering how to make contact is the touchpoint. A touchpoint is an opportunity for messaging to reach a member of the audience segment.

A touchpoint can be the result of direct messaging through NSO activities, such as the director-general of the NSO speaking on a radio show. Touchpoints can also result from the activity of partner organizations, such as a trade union circulating a supportive brochure or a religious leader mentioning the census after weekly prayer services.

A useful exercise for planning touchpoints is to consider a “year in the life” of a hypothetical representative member of an audience segment. A year in the life looks to match the imagined activities of a typical audience segment member with potential touchpoints. Figure 3 demonstrates a year in the life plan for hypothetical members of two audience segments. When developing a year in the life, consider the following:

1. Locations and media outlets frequented by members of an audience segment. Identify culture-specific media that a member of the segment may encounter.
2. Organizations trusted by members of the segment that can deliver positive messaging up to a year before the census. Messaging should develop curiosity about the census and support a receptive attitude toward the census in the audience segment.
3. Exposure to paid and unpaid media, especially during the period immediately before enumeration, which can deliver information about census benefits, schedule, and obligation to participate.

Figure 3.

**Example of Possible Touchpoints for Two “Year In The Life” Audience Segment Members**

	<b>Gabriella - Member of Ethnic Enclave II</b>	<b>Mary - Member of All Around Average II</b>
	Sex: Female Age: 27 Ethnicity: Hispanic Marital Status: Married, mother of 2 Occupation: Hospital administrative staff Barriers: Takes time away from family; census has no purpose in her life, concerned about confidentiality Triggers: Wants to understand and participate in American Dream; can be convinced of benefits of participation	Sex: Female Age: 40 Ethnicity: Chinese-Caucasian Marital Status: Married (2 school-aged children) Occupation: Software Engineer Barriers: Time to participate; lack of knowledge about census Triggers: Wants funding for children’s library; considers it her duty to participate
<b>2019</b>		
May		Hears from retired mother that she may work as an enumerator in their mostly Chinese-American neighborhood
June	Informational flyer inserted with grocery bags at ethnic supermarket	Billboard for census jobs with Web site <www.census.gov>
July	Poster put up at hospital in English and Spanish	
August	Clergy discuss importance of census to local faith community at important events	
September		Daughter’s math lesson for the day includes an exercise based on the census
October	In-school presentations to students on the process and benefits of the census	Bulletin board at community health center has announcement about census
December	Open-air print advertising for the census on public transportation	
<b>2020</b>		
February	Radio host trusted by community discusses importance of upcoming census	Earned and paid media push begins on broadcast media; Facebook stories with relevance to Chinese-American community published online
March	Paid media commercials on sports, news, and entertainment programs using in-culture recognizable personalities raise awareness; lingering doubts answered with earned media editorials in newspapers	Outside advertising during sporting events; paid advertising on population e-commerce Web sites; broadcast advertising and in-culture advertising reach peak volume; mobile providers send public service announcement via short message service (SMS)
<b>April 1</b>		
<b>Census Day</b>		
April	News reports that the census has begun; educational program on government sponsored TV on census	SMS sent by cellular provider announcing census day
May	In-person non-response enumeration carried out by members of ethnic minority; reinforcing trusted voice	Broadcast public service announcement that enumerators are conducting nonresponse follow-up

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

## REACHING THE AUDIENCE

After identifying possible touchpoints, the final step is to identify the specific partners, proxies, and media that can make contact with members of an audience segment.

### Proxies: Partnerships and Outreach

Partners are outside organizations that engage with the NSO to spread a favorable message about the census. The key benefit of partner engagement is access to the partner's social network and capital beyond the normal reach of an NSO. Partners are much more likely to provide additional touchpoints, such as delivering messages that support the census through proxies, than to offer direct material support.

Proxies—people speaking on behalf of the NSO—create message amplification and add trusted voices in support of the census. Proxies may belong to a partner organization or be engaged as individuals. The audience may not be aware the NSO is behind the messaging delivered by a partner organization or proxy. In fact, this is one of the strengths of incorporating partnerships into the integrated communications strategy.

Potential partners may include businesses, educational institutions, elected officials, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, and other nongovernmental organizations. A good partner is trusted by members of an audience segment and has an interest in a successful census. Additionally, a partner organization should be well organized, with previously established lines of communication to its members and constituents. Beyond these considerations, potential partners must also be screened to ensure that they are not involved in practices and have not taken positions that may distract from the NSO's mission of conducting an efficient and accurate census. Senior management should approve potential partners.

Developing partnerships can require considerable time and effort. Partners must be recruited by convincing their leadership of the importance of the census. A useful strategy is to demonstrate how the census supports the needs and aspirations of the constituency the potential partner represents. Also helpful is to clarify the needs of the NSO early in the process of developing partnerships.

Partner organizations should be encouraged to participate in the census process through tailored messaging, similar to the arguments made to communities they service or represent. The NSO should provide ready-to-go distribution materials that can be used by a partner with minimal changes required.

## Generating Coverage: Paid and Earned Media

Paid and earned media are means of direct communication with the audience. While both involve delivery of a tailored message, the primary difference is whether the NSO paid for advertising or generated media coverage by promoting a newsworthy event. As an example of paid media, a full-page advertisement could be bought in a newspaper with information on the importance and timing of the census. The exact content generated by the NSO would be printed in the advertisement.

An earned media example could involve the NSO director-general conducting a question and answer session at a community center with print and broadcast media invited. Reporters would then prepare stories based on the Q&A session. The NSO would not have exact control over the content but could exert substantial influence over the content by preparing the director-general and other officials involved in the event. NSO staff would use their previously existing relationships with reporters to encourage the inclusion of key messages—similar to the content of paid advertising—in the stories generated from the Q&A session.

The combination of paid and earned media complements and reinforces targeted messaging, all making the case for enthusiastic participation in the census. Consider alternating the use of paid and earned media when deciding how to make use of touchpoints to maximize chances for reinforcement.

### Outlets: New and Traditional Media

Traditional media outlets are the over-the-air broadcast and print outlets that existed before widespread Internet availability in many parts of the world. New media outlets are those that have emerged with Internet availability. The line between the two outlets has blurred as traditional outlets have made efforts to establish themselves in new media and vice versa.

The key ideas in effective new media use are interactivity and the leveraging of social networks. Successful use of new media involves the creation of content that initiates a feedback loop, where people look for more information on their own and inspire others in their social network to do the same. New media content should seek to create an expanding and partially self-sustaining community of interest. Coverage in both sources can be either paid or earned. Figure 4 shows examples of the different types of coverage on new and traditional outlets.

Figure 4.  
**New/Traditional and Earned/Paid Example Matrix**

	<b>New</b>	<b>Traditional</b>
<b>Earned</b>	A technology reporter shares a blog written by the NSO concerning the use of handheld devices with her social media followers, spurring discussion about government innovation	A national newspaper writes a story on the director-general of the NSO ceremonially opening the first local census office
<b>Paid</b>	The NSO buys an advertisement on a social media website targeting young users who changed their location in the last year	An informational telephone number is provided during an advertisement broadcast during an important sporting event

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## CONCLUSION

This document has reviewed possible components for an integrated communications strategy. An integrated strategy relies on planning and thoughtful use of the resources that can be devoted to publicity, though the resources available for publicity will vary by country. Resource availability clearly affects the number of partners and advertising time an NSO can engage. Regardless of available resources, the ideas explored in this document will benefit the census.

## REFERENCES

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