

“The 2020 Census and its impact on the Black Lives Matter and Immigrant Rights movements”

By Juan Galeano, Project Consultant for 2020 Census, Cleveland Foundation

It took the combination of the of the economy coming to a screeching halt, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community, the cruel death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement and massive protests nationwide to finally center our nation’s consciousness on the plight of Black lives in America. Our country has always reckoned with issues of race, but something about the Black Lives Matter movement seems different this time. People of all backgrounds are reflecting deeply on ways, both small and large, that they can contribute to improving conditions for Black people in this country. We in philanthropy are also reflecting on our role in this body of work. Traditionally, we like to think about issues in silos – Black Lives Matter is different than the Immigrant Rights movement. That approach can no longer suffice. Within the Immigrant community in the United States, there are people from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and other parts of the world who identify as both Black and Immigrant. To strengthen both movements, stakeholders would benefit from taking an intersectional lens to their work. A critical tool for informing that work, and strengthening both movements, is the decennial census.

A powerful political tool

The U.S. Census is a powerful political tool that affects how money and power are shared in our democracy. It informs the distribution of government resources, how many votes a state has in the Electoral College and political representation in the U.S. Congress. Indirectly, it also informs redistricting at the state and local levels. When Black and Immigrant communities do not participate in the census, it weakens their collective political power and makes it harder for them to hold political leaders accountable to meet their needs. The impact of the census helps to explain efforts to limit census participation among certain communities. The attempt to include a citizenship question on this year’s form along with recent threats to exclude undocumented residents from the census are tactics to intimidate Immigrant communities from participating in the count. The Supreme Court also recently ruled to allow limits on ex-felons voting in Florida, which disproportionately impacts the Black community and diminishes their electoral power. There is no doubt that these developments negatively impact both the immigrant rights and Black Lives Matter movements and make the work of funders that support those movements harder, yet even more necessary.

An indispensable data set

Census data also plays a vital role in documenting links between areas in which people live, their economic conditions, and other social determinants of health. As funders, this data should inform equity questions, such as where we direct resources, the magnitude of the problem and the impact of our work. If Black and Immigrant communities do not fill out the census, they will not exist in the data or in the story told about our cities and states. The census can also help funders understand where Black immigrant communities live, and their migration patterns, giving us a better sense of the intersections between people and place. Unfortunately, both Black and Immigrant communities are “hard-to-count,” meaning they are less likely to fill out the census. There are a multitude of reasons for this, including distrust of government, the digital divide and questions of identity that the census creates for respondents. However, census tract information informs so much of our work that we must meet the challenge of reaching these communities, dedicating the resources and time needed to achieve a more complete count.

What we can do

With the deadline of the census shortened by one month, to September 30, 2020, we have a short window of time to promote a stronger census count. Have you thought about how you are continuing to support

partners on the ground doing census work? Consider sharing resources, best practices, and census intersectional messaging by [Color of Change](#). The Cleveland Foundation is a part of a coalition, together with The George Gund Foundation, the Saint Luke's Foundation, the Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation, the New Venture Fund, and the Ohio Census Advocacy Coalition, supporting nonprofits working to increase the count in areas with low self-response rates in Cleveland. We are expanding our investment in census outreach micro-grants from \$153,000 to \$250,000 for a final push. Global Cleveland and Refugee Response, through their work with the Congolese community, are examples of local grantee partners doing census mobilization work at the intersection of Black and Immigrant identities. We also supported a community of practice between the grantees as well as a virtual bulletin board, highlighting the work of partners at www.completecountcle.org. For funders concerned with Black Lives Matter and Immigrant Rights, investing in these last two months of the census are critical. The impact of the census will last the next decade and beyond. We must act boldly and with a sense of urgency to ensure every person in our country is counted.