

October 2021

California Census 2020 Statewide Funders' Initiative Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Having a complete and accurate count in the U.S. Census is vital for a well-functioning democracy, as it serves to ensure fair and equal political representation and informs the allocation of trillions of federal dollars to support critical public investments. Given its massive size and the fact that it is the most populous and diverse state in the nation,¹ the challenge of achieving a complete and accurate count in California is enormous. Moreover, the stakes for the 2020 Census were especially high, not only because a congressional seat was on the line, but because California has a long history of undercounts—in the last three decennial censuses, California experienced greater undercounts than the rest of the country, especially in communities labeled by the Census Bureau as hard-to-count (HTC).² These historically undercounted communities are also those who experience the greatest inequities in a host of arenas (e.g. income, education, health) that pose barriers to their overall wellbeing. Recognizing the negative impacts that could result from an undercount (for all Californians, but particularly for populations labeled as HTC by the Bureau), and the history of undercounting challenges faced by the state for several decades, a group of philanthropic funders mobilized to create the **California Census 2020 Statewide Funders' Initiative** to ensure a fair and accurate count in California for the 2020 Census. Established in 2017, the initiative had two overarching goals:

- To ensure that hard-to-count populations in California are accurately counted.
- To build a stronger movement infrastructure across the state that can improve opportunities and conditions for Californians who have been politically, economically, and socially marginalized.

Over 490 organizations throughout the state were funded to support community outreach and engagement efforts to reach historically undercounted populations. Grantee organizations were located throughout the state and reflected a variety of organizational sizes, geographic scopes and a range of expertise that supported effective outreach to and engagement with historically undercounted communities. Most grantee organizations were population-focused, having a specific focus on Latinx/Hispanic, immigrant, low-income, and African-American/Black communities, as well as children and youth. One-third or more of grantees focused on the following issues: civic engagement, health equity, community development and/or immigration/immigration rights. The largest proportion of grantee survey respondents (46%) had no prior experience doing census work.

Over 45 foundations and funder partners (the Funder Table) from across the state participated in this initiative, providing financial support of approximately \$26 million to grantee organizations. The Funder Table itself included a range of different funder types, including regional or community foundations,

¹ Clarke, S. U.S. News & World Report. *The Most Diverse States in the U.S.* September 2020.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2020-09-10/california-is-the-most-diverse-state-in-the-us>

² The Census Bureau (the Bureau) defines hard-to-count (HTC) populations as those for whom self-response rates have historically been relatively low. There are a host of reasons that serve as contributing factors for low self-response rates, including (but not limited to) difficulty filling out and sending the form, inadequate language translation support, lack of access to accurate information, migration or lack of a permanent address, and mistrust of government. The Bureau has identified the following populations as hard-to-count: African-American/Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Asian Pacific Islander populations; as well as urban and rural low-income households, renters, young children, people experiencing homelessness, immigrants, English learners, LGBTQ people, and single-parent households. It is important to note that multiple stakeholders have expressed discomfort with the HTC label, noting that it insinuates that the communities themselves are at fault for being missed in census counts, as opposed to focusing on developing better systems to ensure they are counted. Out of respect for this expressed concern, wherever possible and unless citing or directly referring to the Bureau's data, we will refer to HTC populations as "historically undercounted."

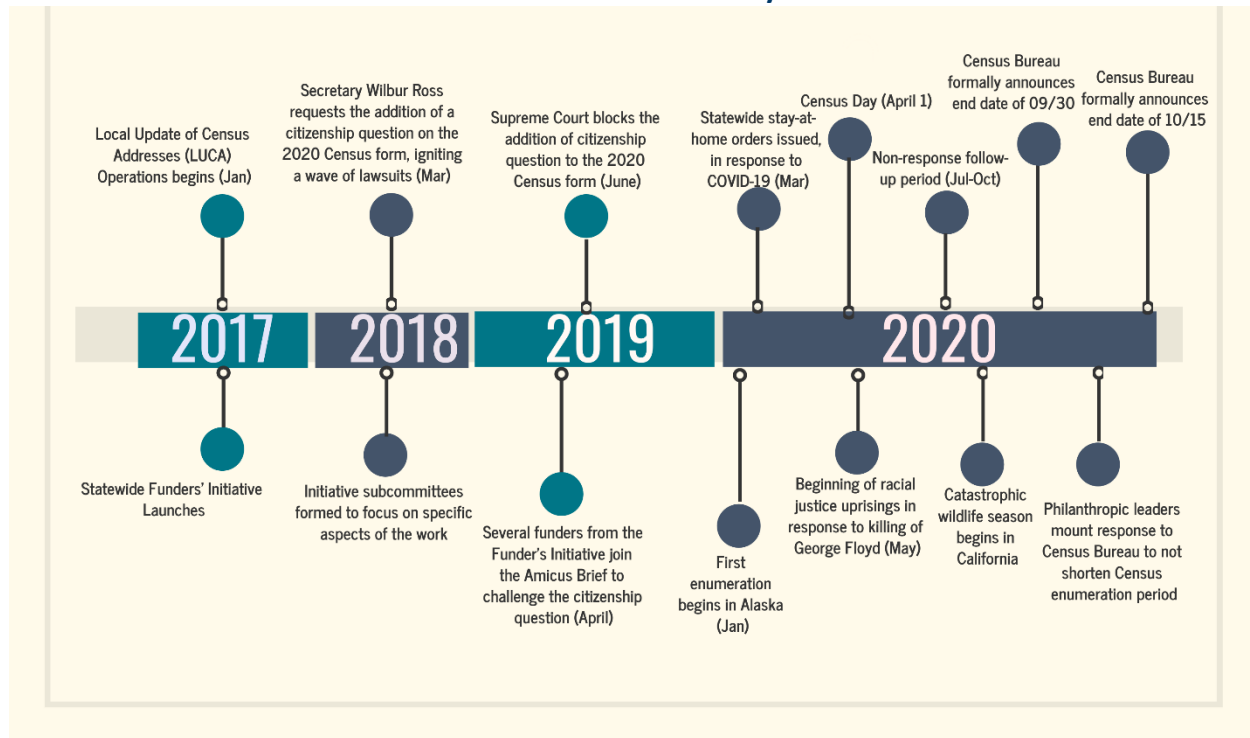
private foundations, private, family foundations, and funder associations. Several members of this Funder Table had previously worked together as part of a funder collaborative to support the statewide *California Counts! 2010 Census Campaign* and sought to apply some of the key learnings from that campaign towards their 2020 efforts, in particular focusing not just on the census itself but also how they and their partners on the ground could strategically leverage census campaign activity in support of aligned civic engagement and movement building.

The Funder Table launched this initiative three years before the 2020 Census specifically to give themselves more time to address challenges that plagued census efforts in the past. They could not have possibly anticipated the chaotic context that marked 2020 and the sheer volume of additional challenges they and their partners would face in their efforts to ensure a complete and accurate count. Racist comments by the Trump Administration and their creation of policies designed to exclude, expel, and reduce safety net support for targeted communities based on race, religion, and immigration status, as well as the administration's direct attempts to interfere with the census by attempting to introduce an untested citizenship question increased fears in immigrant communities and heightened mistrust of the government. The introduction of the first ever online census format posed its own challenges, particularly for low broadband communities and the COVID-19 pandemic and the wildfires of 2020 exacerbated the challenges of reaching historically undercounted communities.

The formidable and unprecedented challenges experienced in 2020 resulted in the need for multiple actors in the initiative to engage in persistent and creative adaptation and pivoting. It also affirmed the decision at the launch of the initiative to focus not only on the campaign itself but also on aligned movement building and civic engagement, as the 2020 context afforded numerous opportunities to leverage census efforts to address the ways in which the challenges of 2020 were disproportionately harming the historically undercounted communities that the initiative's outreach workers sought to engage.

In the fall of 2019, GCIR commissioned Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to serve as the evaluation partner for this initiative. As was true of all census actors, the evaluation team adjusted and extended evaluation activities to adapt alongside the participants. Data collection took place from February 2020 through the summer of 2021 and included a review of documents, analysis of Twitter activity, and surveys of and interviews with funders, grantees, and key partners. Through this evaluation, SPR endeavored to document the story of the campaign within the context of significant upheaval that marked 2020, while also capturing collective outcomes and learnings from this enormously complex undertaking that could inform future census campaigns as well as philanthropy's efforts to support them. To provide some context, on the next page is a high-level timeline of key events that influenced the course of the 2020 census campaign.

Census 2020: Timeline of Key Events



This executive summary provides an overview of the range of activities that grantees employed to engage historically undercounted communities in the 2020 Census, the outcomes that emerged as a result of the coordinated efforts of the Statewide Funders' Initiative and its partners, and recommendations for future census efforts and for funders wishing to replicate or continue the work of the Statewide Funders' Initiative.

Census 2020 Campaign Activities

Despite the barriers imposed by the 2020 context, grantee partners persisted, engaging in a remarkable volume and variety of creative and culturally sensitive activities that were tailored to reach historically undercounted populations. Below are highlights of these activities, most of which fell in one of five core strategy areas: census community education and engagement; media, communications, and messaging, advocacy and organizing; training and technical assistance; and census resourcing and implementation support.

- Census community education and engagement.** Most grantees reported community education and engagement as a core part of their work, with the importance of engaging trusted messengers to conduct effective and meaningful outreach serving as a resounding theme across respondents. Many grantees originally planned to conduct in-person outreach to HTC populations through tabling at community events; presentations and workshops at schools, community centers, and religious institutions; and door-to-door canvassing. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to shift their in-person engagement strategies in favor of more socially distanced activities. Common activities included phone banking and texting, as well as providing culturally and linguistically tailored census materials and services. Some used games and contests as a hook for engagement (e.g. trivia contests and Facebook Lotería events) and others used the arts as a vehicle for engagement, connecting census to issues that were most important to their communities.
- Media, Communications, and Messaging.** Media and communications was the second most commonly reported grantee activity, with grantees from the San Joaquin Valley reporting especially high levels of activity in this arena. Grantee messaging and campaign efforts spanned across a variety of mediums, including social media, radio, television, and billboards. To reach low-broadband individuals and older, non-English speaking monolingual populations, several organizations focused on ethnic media—particularly television and radio—as vehicles for messaging dissemination. In a couple of regions, grantees worked with regional stakeholders to hold joint press conferences to encourage community participation in the census. Grantees also leaned on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter to share compelling and tailored census information in multiple languages. SPR’s Twitter analysis revealed that messaging that resonated with historically undercounted populations emphasized the following themes: ease of completion, inclusion of all communities, connections between census and key social and political moments in 2020, data safety and privacy assurances, and the connection between an accurate census count and COVID 19 supports.
- Advocacy and Organizing.** Given the COVID-19 pandemic and political and legal challenges associated with Census 2020, advocacy and organizing was another important area of grantee activity, with grantees from Los Angeles County being especially active in this arena. Much of the

Advocacy and Organizing Examples

- At least one grantee mobilized partner organizations to **submit public comments** to oppose the addition of a citizen question to the 2020 census.
- One grantee served as a **plaintiff in a lawsuit** filed by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and Asian Americans Advancing Justice regarding the exclusion of undocumented immigrants in the final census count.
- In the San Diego-Imperial County region, a grantee convened with other organizations serving similar communities to provide **census information and capacity-building trainings** using a train-the-trainer model and translated census materials.

Creative Messaging Activities

- Young Hmong creatives in Fresno developed a [census comedy skit](#) to encourage their community to fill out the census through humor and song
- [Videos](#) were developed to highlight the census as a tool for documenting Sikh contributions to California’s history and bringing resources to the Punjabi Sikh community.
- Cooking shows** in Fresno taught viewers how to prepare traditional Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese dishes while educating viewers about the census.

reported advocacy work focused on litigation and policy advocacy to combat the unprecedented level of census interference by the Trump Administration around the census timeline and who could participate or be counted in the census. In complementary efforts, community organizers continued to mobilize their constituencies while also shifting to more virtual organizing spaces and tactics in response to the dangers of the pandemic. Some grantees also played a role in convening census stakeholders in their region to create a space for collaboration, discussions about best practices, and resource and information sharing.

- **Training and Technical Assistance.** Training and technical assistance was another area of commonly reported campaign activity, with grantees from Northern and Southern San Joaquin Valley reporting more engagement in this arena compared to other regions. The overarching goal of most of these activities was to strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations to increase their reach to historically undercounted communities. Training topics ranged from census messaging, data, evaluation, mapping, digital outreach, graphic design, and public relations. Some organizations utilized a train-the-trainer approach to help partners to train their own staff and other local organizations. Some grantees also provided individualized technical assistance to partner organizations in areas such as outreach planning, data analysis support, legal guidance, and grant application support.
- **Census resourcing and implementation support.** Lastly, census resourcing and implementation support activities proved to be important for broadening regional reach into historically undercounted communities. Activities in this arena included participation in the Local Update of Census Addresses Program (LUCA) prior to the census launch, regranting to smaller CBOs that have deep relationships and trust in different historically undercounted populations, and strategic coordination with the U.S. Census Bureau (the Bureau) and Complete Count Committees to help increase understanding across partner organizations about federal guidelines and policies, which were unclear in the ever-evolving COVID-19 context, and to help communicate issues and concerns across all actors.

Statewide Funders' Initiative Outcomes

Despite all of the chaos that marked 2020, and the persistent emergence of new obstacles throughout the census journey, participants in the Statewide Funders' Initiative were still able to contribute to a range of outcomes that speak to the efficacy of the Census 2020 campaign, the connections between census participation and aligned civic engagement and movement building, and the impact of the Funders' Initiative.

California Census 2020 Campaign

Despite the unforeseen, persistent and unprecedented challenges faced by the initiative's partners, initial results³ indicate that, for Census 2020, California surpassed its Census 2010 self-response rate (SRR) by 1.4 percentage points. As shown in Exhibit 1 below, all but two regions (Region 2: North Coast, and Region 8: Los Angeles County) exceeded their 2010 self-response rates.

³ As of the writing of this report, the Census data was still undergoing quality checks and therefore not yet finalized.

Exhibit 1. Overview of Self-Response Rates, by Region and Statewide⁴

| Region | 2020 Regional SRR | 2010 Final SRR | Difference from 2010 |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 1: Superior California | 69.3 | 67.4 | 1.9 |
| 2: North Coast | 65.0 | 65.3 | -0.3 |
| 3: San Francisco Bay Area | 75.3 | 72.2 | 3.1 |
| 4: Northern San Joaquin Valley | 65.8 | 61.3 | 4.5 |
| 5: Central Coast | 72.0 | 69.5 | 2.5 |
| 6: Southern San Joaquin Valley | 66.2 | 65.6 | 0.6 |
| 7: Inland Empire | 66.7 | 63.3 | 3.4 |
| 8: Los Angeles County | 65.1 | 69.0 | -3.9 |
| 9: Orange County | 76.6 | 71.7 | 4.9 |
| 10: San Diego- Imperial | 73.6 | 68.1 | 5.5 |
| California | 69.6 | 68.2 | +1.4 |
| National | 67.0 | 66.5 | +0.5 |

The increase in the state’s self-response rates compared to 2010 is an indicator of outreach and education success, and is a remarkable achievement, especially considering the many obstacles census workers faced in 2020. It speaks to the power and potential of this entire public/private venture wherein the skills and expertise of advocates, organizers, and community-based organizations, coupled with significant investments and partnership from philanthropy, the state, and the census bureau, were strategically and successfully leveraged in service of a more complete count.

However, while the overall SRR is positive compared to the last decennial census, California’s self-response rate ranked 17th in the country when compared to other states and territories, and it is still too early to tell the extent to which HTC populations were accurately counted, as that analysis is still underway. That said, the fact that Los Angeles County’s SRR is 3.9 percentage points *below* the 2010 rates is an indicator for concern, given that Los Angeles County is considered the hardest-to-count county in the country⁵ and that this county had been hardest hit by the pandemic by the end of 2020.⁶ Moreover, recent reports indicate strong concern that people of color and children were likely undercounted in the census, indicating that we may need to brace ourselves for a less rosy picture with respect to undercounts, particularly for children and people of color, and there may be yet more work to be done to support greater success in reaching historically undercounted populations in 2030.

Civic Engagement and Movement-Building

In addition to supporting a complete and accurate census count by ensuring that historically undercounted populations in California are accurately counted, the Funders’ Initiative’s second goal was to support a stronger movement infrastructure across the state to improve conditions and opportunities for politically, economically, and socially marginalized Californians. To that end, this evaluation yielded findings of progress in three key areas, as described below.

⁴ Retrieved from <https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates/self-response.html>

⁵ Wozny, K. US News & World Report. *California Boosts Outreach Efforts for 2020 Census*. (June 2019). <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-06-10/california-ramps-up-outreach-efforts-for-2020-census>

⁶ Levin, J., and Palmeri, C. Bloomberg News. *Los Angeles is Now Worst-Hit U.S. Metro Area for COVID-19 Cases*. (December 2020). <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-17/los-angeles-is-now-worst-hit-u-s-metro-area-for-covid-19-cases>

- **Strengthened capacities for effective civic engagement and mobilization.** Despite (and sometimes fueled by) the difficult context of 2020, over the course of the campaign, grantee organizations were still able to strengthen specific capacities that are critical to effective mobilization and civic engagement efforts. This includes their confidence and capacity to adjust strategies and adapt to ever-changing environment, use data to inform strategies, and conduct digital and virtual census outreach and education.
- **Strengthened infrastructure for civic engagement and movement building.** Funder survey respondents strongly agreed that the census efforts resulted in a strengthened infrastructure to support ongoing civic participation of California communities. Indeed, as funders and grantees endeavored to meet their goals around census outreach while also attending to the fallout of COVID-19 and engaging in solidarity with racial justice efforts, evidence of a strengthened infrastructure for civic engagement and movement building emerged. This evidence came in the form of expanded community bases and increased coalition building, the development of regional infrastructures to support civic engagement and movement building, continued collaborations with census tables to support other issues, strengthened networks and relationships, and the formation of new partnerships to engage in future cross-collaboration.
- **Alignment across equity-focused issues and movements.** The evaluation revealed evidence in alignment between census efforts and a number of critical, equity-focused issue areas, most keenly demonstrated through strategic and aligned messaging around the connections between census participation and a host of issue areas where inequities for historically undercounted populations run deep. The most commonly aligned issue areas included redistricting and resource allocations, voter engagement/GOTV efforts, immigrant rights, racial equity and racial justice, and COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Impact of the Statewide Funders' Initiative

The intention behind the creation of the Statewide Funders' Initiative was to create a vehicle for funders to learn about, leverage, and effectively support census efforts regionally and across the state. It was designed to facilitate more effective coordination and deployment of philanthropic resources to ensure an accurate and complete count, which was not easy, given the sheer size of the state, the diversity within and across regions, and the different geographic contexts within the state (and even within regions). The evaluation identified three key areas of impact wherein the initiative provided strong value for funders and partners, as described below.

- **Coordinating philanthropic engagement.** Overall, there was overwhelming agreement across funders, grantees, and partners that California's Statewide Funders' Initiative was an effective vehicle for organizing philanthropy in support of the 2020 Census. Across the board, funders expressed deep appreciation for the initiative's role in *servicing as a centralized hub of information and action*, which enabled funders to rely on trusted partners to help them stay informed, rather than having to track every moving detail, which helped to inform quick decision-making and action within an ever-changing context. Evaluation respondents also emphasized the importance of the initiative in *catalyzing and streamlining census investments*, which enabled a greater diversity of funders to participate and

“I never miss a meeting because it's super highly organized—it has a strong coordinator, but it has a really strong steering committee of funders. And there's always a learning component there, so I do feel like, on my own, as a program officer who's working in this very spread out set of issues, that I feel very much able to stay on top of it.” – Funder partner

helped them to become “better internal advocates” for increased census support. Finally, some funders emphasized the important role that the initiative provided a vehicle for *harnessing the power of philanthropy*, noting that having a statewide Funder Table aggregated power and ensured that philanthropy had a voice in Census 2020 decision-making. Some individual funders noted that it would have been much more difficult to navigate the inevitable, messy politics within regions and with the state without the weight of the larger collective behind them.

- **Serving as a Bridge Within the Broader Census 2020 Ecosystem.** The other clear area of impact where evaluation respondents saw the value add of the Statewide Funders’ Initiative was in the role that the Funder Table played as a bridge within a complex and, at times, chaotic Census 2020 ecosystem. Respondents saw great value in the ways in which Funder Table actors served as a *bridge between regional and national philanthropy*, highlighting the active role that multiple California philanthropic leaders played at national tables and how that shaped national census work and vice-versa. Funders, national partners, and representatives from the state also identified the initiative as a *powerful model of public-private partnership*, noting that the initiative’s efforts to create a centralized voice for philanthropy and its creation of formal structures for engagement with the state catalyzed deeper and more effective coordination. Finally, respondents shared that the initiative provided distinct benefit in that it strategically *complemented state census investments*. To this end, respondents emphasized the “nimbleness” associated with philanthropic capital, which enabled census grantees to: (1) *engage early*, which created space for planning and partnership building even before state dollars were released, (2) *bolster participation* among smaller organizations who did not have the capacity to pursue state funding, (3) *pursue advocacy and narrative change campaigns* amidst a chaotic and contentious census context, and—mostly importantly—(4) *innovate and pivot their work to be responsive to needs on the ground*.

“What was really important through the Funders' Initiative was just understanding who funded where so that I felt like I had a real understanding of where the gaps were, and that directly informed my motivation for grantmaking to fill in the gaps ... I felt like I had a good understanding of ... where were funders gravitating towards and where were they not and where were there more hard-to- count communities that needed resources.” – Funder partner

- **Laying the groundwork for future collaboration.** A final legacy of the Statewide Funders’ Initiative extends beyond the census itself. As evaluation respondents talked about what they gained from their Census 2020 experience, many pointed to the value of this initiative in *creating a sense of community across funders* focused on supporting historically undercounted populations, which created a shared space for learning and connection, and helped to lay the groundwork for future collaboration. The initiative also *strengthened engagement of individual funders* which respondents hoped would lead to continued investment in and support of census efforts.

“Census work really laid the foundation for so much of our partnership work, in terms of building that muscle, as I said, of coordination and communication. Really understanding where the opportunities for partnership were. So that when COVID hit, we were ready to hit the ground running because those relationships were already built, there was a foundation for a partnership which resonated for folks.” – Funder Partner

Recommendations for the Road Ahead

The evaluation team asked initiative participants at all levels to reflect on their experiences with Census 2020 and the role and efficacy of the Statewide Funders' Initiative. Participants offered a number of thoughtful recommendations to support Census 2030, aligned civic engagement and movement building, and the effectiveness of the Statewide Funder Table.

Preparing Strategically for Census 2030

When we asked funders and partners to share lessons from Census 2020 that can help inform future efforts, the resounding theme that emerged was to *start earlier* to ensure that all who are engaged in census efforts have the time to prepare, coordinate, and align efforts to ensure effectiveness. Another strong and related theme was that engaging in census is not something we should consider doing every 10 years but that it should be a continuous focus⁷, as there is so much work to be done in the years in-between census counts. Other, more specific recommendations related to preparations for Census 2030 include:

- **Deepen investments in LUCA.** Funders emphasized the importance of committing more resources to the Local Update of Census Addresses Program (LUCA). This is one of the least visible census strategies, and yet it is one of the most critical for ensuring that those working on the ground to reach historically undercounted populations have accurate data for their outreach efforts. Population shifts within the state and communities are growing in significance and it is important to know where people live in order to reach them.
- **Advocate now to ensure that government at all levels is adequately prepared for census investments and participation.** Several respondents acknowledged that the state set aside an unprecedented level of resources to support census efforts, but they also emphasized the need to “keep pressure on the state to ensure it continues to invest significantly in the census.” Respondents added that the state should be encouraged to not only fund significantly, but to disburse those funds earlier.
- **Engage in multi-level capacity building much sooner.** A number of interview respondents indicated that there are certain kinds of capacity work that can be done much earlier so that all census actors, including funders, can be ready and equipped to engage their roles more effectively. Examples included building organizational capacity around understanding and using data as well as [re]educating funders about what foundations can and cannot do to support census efforts.
- **Invest in strategic messaging support.** Several respondents noted that there are a number of ways they can prepare in advance of Census 2030 to ensure strategic messaging effectively reaches and resonates with historically undercounted populations. A few expressed a desire for

“Even at the local level, we need to make sure to get census into the county strategic plan. We need to make sure to get the city to quickly adopt the resolution and get started earlier. There are probably some key things that we could do: like five years out, we should get the county to make census community outreach part of their legislative agenda and possibly also have a strategy document on related to advocacy to start readying things.” – Grantee Partner

⁷ The Funders Census Initiative (FCI) has offered a set of recommendations aimed at the role and actions that philanthropy can take now and during the subsequent years prior to Census 2030. The following ten-year plan can be accessed here: <https://funderscommittee.org/resource/a-blueprint-for-philanthropic-census-engagement>

clearly articulated statewide objectives for overarching media and messaging plans, developed well in advance of the campaign. Many emphasized the importance of addressing translation needs early.

- **Build digital capacity.** Census 2020 was the first year that an online format for completing the survey was introduced. While it is still not clear what impact the online format may have had with respect to completion rates, multiple funders emphasized the urgency of building digital capacity, in case online completion becomes the dominant method of enumeration in the future. This includes investing *now* to address inequitable access to digital broadband, particularly in historically undercounted communities.
- **Stay committed to census throughout the decade and build organizational capacity to live into that commitment.** One of the realities of the nonprofit world (and now, as an impact of COVID-19) is high organizational turnover. This has obvious impacts for the work on the ground, but others noted that it also had impacts at the funder level, when critical staff who served as census champions in their organizations left their positions. Respondents shared that having tools and trainings to help institutions maintain knowledge and keep census as a priority throughout the decade could help.
- **Mobilize for specific changes to the census form.** At least one funder respondent indicated that the time in between census periods is ideal for addressing persistent concerns about the census form. This in-between time is an opportunity to consider, for example, how to add other demographic categories that will be useful in helping to determine community needs and resource allocations, as well as to more accurately reflect the rich and complex diversity in our communities.

“If we want the 2030 census to be better, to do a better job of including historically undercounted communities, that means that we need to make sure that the census bureau can better center the lived experiences of historically undercounted communities in all of the decisions that they make around policy and operations, and that requires that those resources, those organizations have the staffing and capacity to be able to engage around those issues in advance of when decisions are made, and that requires funding.” – Grantee partner

Leverage Momentum and Infrastructure for Movement Building and Civic Engagement

Multiple respondents recognized that the collective efforts of the Census 2020 campaign, particularly in the face of so many challenges, ultimately resulted in strong sense of momentum for mobilizing around equity-focused issues, as well as a fairly robust census infrastructure that can continue to be leveraged in support of equity-focused movement building and aligned civic engagement. Specific recommendations include:

- **Continue to utilize the Census 2020 infrastructure, particularly at the regional level, in service of other civic engagement activities.** Multiple respondents recognized the power of the regional Census 2020 infrastructure, particularly considering its network of actors that are already deeply connected with and trusted by historically undercounted communities. Undergirding this recommendation was the desire from respondents to keep up the momentum and not lose the advantage of all they had built through their census efforts.

“I think we should just keep these Complete Count Committees alive and start meeting every couple months for the next 10 years to just keep talking about the census. I don’t think we need to lose what we just built.” – Grantee partner

- **Create a resource for easy access to tools and learning to support future endeavors.** A number of respondents expressed a desire for a way to make tools, resources, and learnings easily accessible to funders and other census actors in advance of the census period. This would help to ensure that no one has to “reinvent the wheel,” learning and best practices could be shared within and across regions, and actors at all levels could dive into the work more quickly and efficiently.
- **Maintain and strengthen the relationships built across the initiative’s census network.** Multiple respondents named relationships as a key strength of this initiative. Several emphasized the importance of continuing to build relationships across regions in order to support more effective coordination and learning across regions and geographic types (i.e., rural, urban, suburban). Others noted the importance of continuing to nurture relationships with community groups and the state while also attending to cross-sector relationship building in order to create opportunities for deeper and more aligned coordination for future efforts.

“Multi-sector connectivity is really important. Having a direct and mostly open line of communication with the state, community groups as much as possible is critical to make this happen. It is really important because it feels like every minute and every penny counts.”—Grantee partner

Continue and Improve the Efforts of the Statewide Funders’ Initiative

Funder participants found value in the initiative and multiple respondents shared that the initiative should continue in order to provide more robust support for Census 2030 and to support aligned efforts. Respondents also offered some recommendations about ways in which to strengthen or improve the initiative. These include:

- **Recruit more funders, and a greater diversity of funders.** While the Statewide Funders’ Initiative pulled in many more philanthropic funders (and dollars) for Census 2020 than in 2010, there is a strong desire to recruit more, and to start that recruitment effort now, in order to ensure better information sharing and coordination prior to Census 2030. Several respondents added that they would like to see more diversity of funders recruited, including smaller, more regional, and more family foundations.
- **Create clear points of entry that accommodate different levels of engagement.** Because census is not a funding priority for many foundations, it is important to have, as one respondent described, “a clear and expansive rationale for census education and outreach that helps many funders find a role in the overall effort.” With respect to these roles, other respondents encouraged the Funder Table to clearly articulate ways to participate that reflect different levels of engagement, to accommodate foundations with different capacities, resources, and funding foci.

- **Encourage participating funders to be flexible and incorporate responsive funds into their budgets to support Census 2030 efforts.** Setting aside rapid-response funding to support adaptive capacity of organizations on the ground was actually a recommendation from the 2010 Census, though its utility was affirmed in the 2020 effort, as the 2020 context became increasingly unstable and chaotic. Respondents encouraged this as a continued practice for 2030.
- **Hold more Funder Table meetings and include more “outside learning” and inspirational components into funder meetings.** Multiple respondents shared that they deeply valued the meetings and would have liked to have had more of them. Several noted that they especially enjoyed having time to learn from each other during convenings as well as from others who are “census experts,” particularly as it relates to historically undercounted populations, and requested that more “outside learning opportunities” be incorporated into each funder collaborative meeting.
- **Consider extending the Funder Table’s role beyond the census.** Some respondents expressed a desire for the Statewide Funder Table to more intentionally expand its role beyond the census, to support aligned movement building and continued civic engagement in efforts that are directly tied to the census (such as redistricting). Respondents noted that, should they move forward to support aligned movement building and civic engagement efforts, they should consider “how to do this more democratically, and in a co-designed fashion with grantees to define what is movement building.”

“The 2020 Census was such a slog; it was such an unusual year and all of us working on census were just depleted and exhausted toward the end. It was really hard to cross that finish line in October. As much as we loved everything about the census and wanted to see it be as accurate and fair as possible, the flip side was we were burned out. I think offering opportunities where you could be motivated, where we were refreshed in this work and re-inspired to do this work, I think could have been amazing.”
– Grantee partner