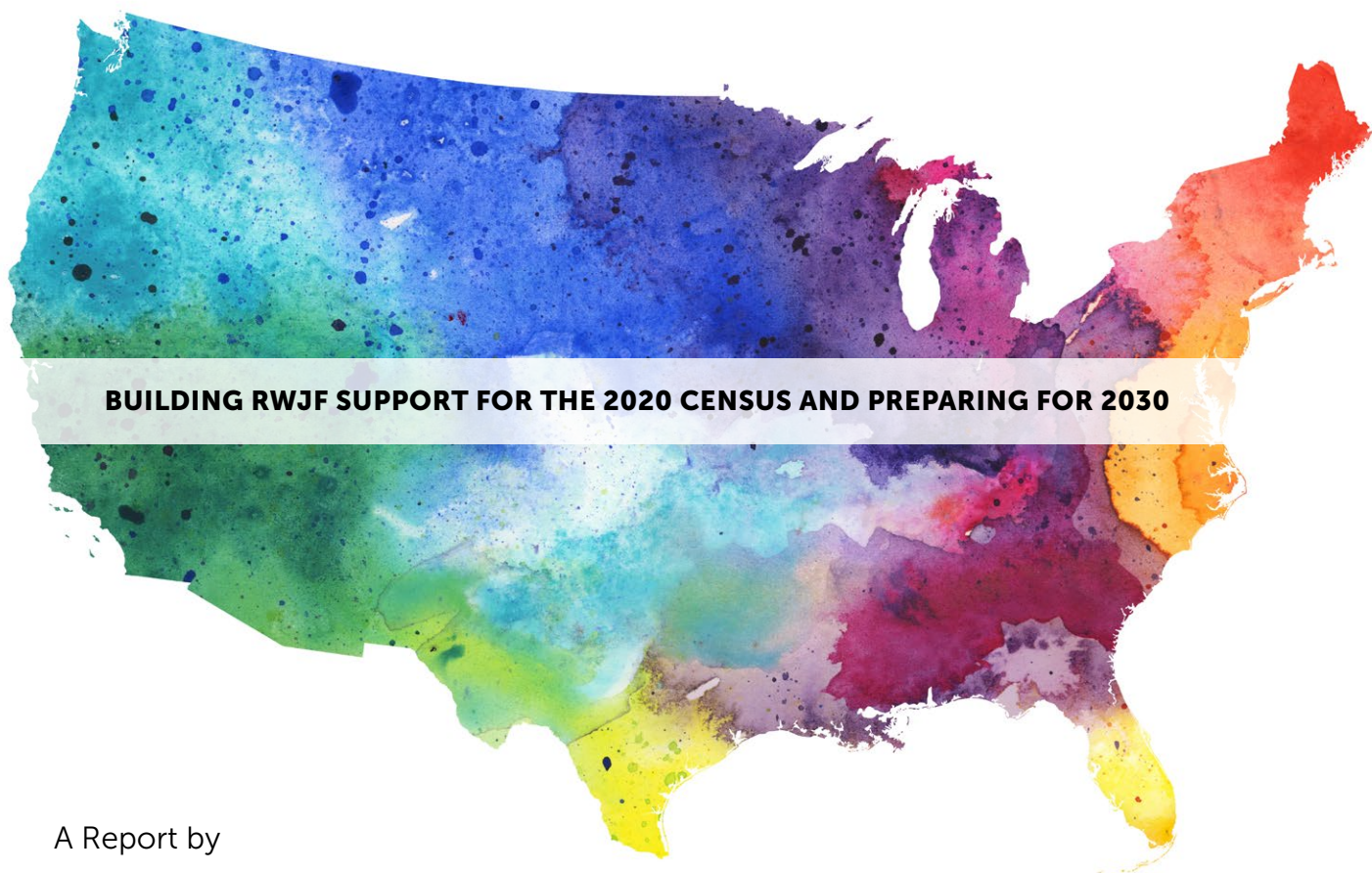


# The Census Is Foundational



**BUILDING RWJF SUPPORT FOR THE 2020 CENSUS AND PREPARING FOR 2030**

A Report by  
Mary Geisz, PhD  
September 2023

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# Executive Summary

## PHILANTHROPY'S SUPPORT OF THE 2020 CENSUS

In 2015, a group of 10 foundations, most of which were participants in the Democracy Funders Collaborative, came together in response to concerns about the upcoming 2020 census. Decennial census data are used to apportion seats in the House of Representatives according to population and to configure state legislative districts and county, city, and school jurisdictional districts. Together with additional data collected through the annual American Community Survey, they also drive the distribution of federal funds. If the census is incomplete or inaccurate, it is difficult to achieve equity in health, education, housing, and many other areas of day-to-day life.

Obtaining a complete and accurate census count has historically been difficult, especially among people of color, immigrants, and young children. The 2020 census posed particular challenges due to inadequate federal funding, policy issues, a move to a primarily online census, and a proposal for the introduction of a question about citizenship and immigration status. The group of foundations formed a Census Subgroup (the “Subgroup”), chaired by Gary Bass, PhD, of the Bauman Foundation and with substantial assistance from civil rights lawyer Karen Narasaki, JD, to address these challenges and help ensure a complete and accurate count.

The Subgroup created a Plan of Action, which was essential to its work and success. It included three fundamental priorities:

- **Policy improvements** to both the decennial census and the annual American Community Survey to ensure adequate federal funding and sound strategic federal decisionmaking
- **Outreach and increased support** by leveraging the contributions of the Census Subgroup and pulling in other funders and sectors
- **Public outreach and education** to improve census response—called “Get Out the Count”—especially among traditionally undercounted populations

Key to the Subgroup’s work was its two-track approach for distributing philanthropic funds, which offered options for funders to participate in a way that was most comfortable for them:

- A **pooled fund** of funder contributions that made grants guided by the Subgroup
- **Aligned funding**, through which the direct grants of funders were coordinated by the Subgroup so that these grants were consistent with shared objectives.

The Subgroup's census campaign infrastructure was complex, with a strategy to distribute funds, materials, and other resources quickly to communities across the country through a network of hubs that operated at multiple levels and included many organizations.

The Census Subgroup started with 10 foundations: Annie Casey Foundation, Bauman Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Democracy Fund, Ford Foundation, Joyce Foundation, JPB Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Wallace H. Coulter Foundation. In time, they were joined by eight other foundations: The California Endowment, Heising-Simons Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

### **RWJF'S COMMITMENT TO THE 2020 CENSUS CAMPAIGN**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Program staff members had observed Census Subgroup meetings during its post-launch period in 2016 and were subsequently joined by Senior Program Officer Carolyn Miller, MA, MS, from RWJF's Research-Evaluation-Learning (REL) unit. While initially unclear about a census connection for RWJF, Miller came to understand that an inaccurate census would negatively impact the population groups that RWJF supports and that an accurate census would advance health equity and help ensure that marginalized groups would not be disadvantaged for the next decade. Thus, the census could be considered fundamental to the Foundation's work. In 2017, RWJF became a member of the Census Subgroup, with an initial small investment.

For RWJF, accurate census data are important for the many research projects conducted by its grantees, and an accurate count has major implications for federal funding of the public programs that impact the populations served by its grantees.

For RWJF, accurate census data are important for the many research projects conducted by its grantees, and an accurate count has major implications for federal funding of the public programs that impact the populations served by its grantees. This data- and program-focused reasoning resonated with RWJF senior staff and the Foundation's involvement expanded, with contributions to both the pooled fund and to intentional individual "aligned" projects where RWJF could be most helpful.

Starting in 2017, RWJF made four grants totaling \$2,807,000 to the pooled fund and another of \$750,000 in 2020 directed at COVID-19 pandemic support. It also made a total of \$7,950,000 in direct grants to organizations that included the National

League of Cities, Univision, the Leadership Conference Education Fund, Faith in Action, and the Brennan Center for Justice, and to the Fund for New Jersey to support the census count in its home state. This support helped to increase the count among historically undercounted communities and populations throughout the country, to focus legal and policy work to ensure the quality and integrity of the 2020 census, and to extend the reach of New Jersey Counts, the state's census initiative.

### **RWJF's impact on the 2020 census campaign was significant in multiple ways:**

- Its total support of \$11,507,000 made RWJF one of the Subgroup's largest funders.
- RWJF's reputation added weight to the census outreach work of the Census Subgroup, the Fund for New Jersey, and the other organizations it supported.
- As an issue-based funder, RWJF provided an example to issue-based, place-based, and other nondemocracy funders of the connection between the missions of those organizations and the census.
- The process of attracting RWJF to the Census Subgroup afforded the Subgroup with the opportunity to learn best ways to draw in other issue-based funders.
- The inclusion of RWJF as a member of the Subgroup brought the knowledge, insight, and experience of RWJF's Program staff to Subgroup discussions and decisionmaking.
- As the largest healthcare foundation in the United States, RWJF offered an entrée to the health field for those deep into the census and can continue to educate other health funders about the importance of the census and the American Community Survey.

### **For RWJF, several key takeaways emerged from its experience in the 2020 census campaign:**

- The census is foundational to realizing a Culture of Health. Census participation is an activity of civic engagement, and civic engagement is a pillar of the Culture of Health action area, [Making Health a Shared Value](#).
- A commitment to the census is potentially part of RWJF's ongoing evolution as it considers its role in dismantling structural racism and its impacts on health.
- The census work had potential political implications, and RWJF's successful involvement there helped build confidence about such projects.
- The opportunity to get involved as one of a group of funders and contribute to a shared pool eased RWJF's entrance into the census campaign—a structure that could have relevancy for future philanthropic collaboration.
- Starting slowly and taking a limited risk with smaller grants, as RWJF did when initially joining the census campaign, can build understanding and momentum and be a good strategy for exploring a new space before making a larger commitment.

### **KEY CENSUS CAMPAIGN ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS**

#### **The collaboration among funders and with grantees across the country resulted in important accomplishments.** In particular:

- The total national philanthropic funding was at least \$117.9 million, with state philanthropic funding adding at least another \$75.1 million.
- Concerted advocacy resulted in increased federal funding for the Census Bureau and the 2020 census over that requested by the Trump administration.

- CEOs and trustees of multiple foundations signed letters to the Census Bureau to express concern about key issues that could affect the count, such as prison gerrymandering, the citizenship question, and the shortening of the pandemic census collection period.
- After much advocacy and six lawsuits, the Supreme Court blocked the citizenship question in a 5-to-4 decision on June 27, 2019.
- When the pandemic shutdown occurred two weeks before the April 1 Census Day, funders were instrumental in the “COVID-19 pivot,” quickly making additional grants, allowing great flexibility in the spending of grant funds, and limiting reporting requirements.
- The 67% self-response rate reported by the Census Bureau<sup>1</sup> was higher than the 66.5% rate in 2010, despite the impact of the pandemic and other significant challenges.
- The complex infrastructure so critical to the 2020 census is being maintained in advance of the 2030 census and has been tapped for a range of other civic engagement efforts.

### **The 2020 census campaign offered important lessons as interested parties plan for 2030:**

- Start early, very early—and recruit strong leaders with the time, experience, and willingness to lead the effort.
- Create a clear Plan of Action with something for everyone. As plans are being made, employ an iterative process that gathers multiple viewpoints and fosters buy-in.
- When working to engage funders: recognize that they fund in silos, so it's important to appeal to their interests; offer multiple ways to connect so every funder can find its place; allow funders the time they needed to develop trust in the process; involve as many local funders as possible.
- Build an infrastructure to provide technical assistance and training to national and local funders and to share best approaches as program officers make their cases to their boards.
- Consider using the census infrastructure for other campaigns and civic engagement.

### **PREPARATION FOR 2030**

The Census Subgroup has evolved into the Census Equity Initiative, also guided by a three-part Plan of Action:

- **Focus on policy and operational concerns**—such as prison gerrymandering, race and ethnicity questions, and Congressional appropriations—to produce a better count.
- **Support collaborative action**, especially at the state level.
- **Encourage research** with priority on studying the use of Medicaid, SNAP, and other administrative data by the Census Bureau and to update (by the Project on Government Oversight) the “Counting for Dollars” database, which shows how much money, by government program, state, and county, is dependent on accurate census data.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *2020 Census: Tracking Self-Response and Nonresponse Followup for Housing Units by State*, October 28, 2020.



RWJF currently supports the Census Equity Initiative with a grant of \$400,000 through mid-September 2023, with the expectation of similar support over the next several years and a ramping up in funding closer to 2030.

The Foundation is also a member of a separate funder collaborative on redistricting, Fair Representation on Redistricting, and is one of its largest funders, with a \$2 million grant renewed at \$1 million through October 2023. RWJF's Policy department has funded several initiatives in the democracy space with discussions on the Foundation's continuing role in this area.

### **THE CENSUS AS FOUNDATIONAL TO A CULTURE OF HEALTH**

RWJF's measured entry into the census campaign allowed it to develop a clear understanding of the census as the bedrock of the data that are so critical to the research it funds; to the resourcing of the health and social programs that the beneficiaries of its grantees depend upon; and to the underpinnings of the functioning democracy so necessary to achieving true health equity. In short, the census is truly foundational to the Culture of Health that is RWJF's vision.

The importance of an accurate and complete census count to the realization of RWJF's commitment "to work together to create opportunities that improve health equity for everyone" cannot be understated. Including the RWJF voice in the broader conversation about the 2030 census will benefit the development and operation of the census itself and will expand the Foundation's own knowledge base and further its consideration of its role in civic engagement writ large.





## About This Report

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**T**his report documents both what was accomplished through the Census Subgroup’s collaborative effort (called here the “census campaign”) and what was learned. With a focus on RWJF’s role, the hope is this report will help guide RWJF toward the 2030 census and to possible other civic engagement initiatives.

The report’s content draws upon a rich set of documents that describe and assess the work of the Census Subgroup and others in the “census infrastructure.” It also captures interviews of 13 individuals inside and outside RWJF connected to work on the 2020 census and after. [Appendices](#) at the end of the report include:

- A list of key census campaign participants, initiatives, and terms
- An annotated list of resources providing background and detail on the Subgroup’s work
- A list of interviewees

Author Mary Geisz, PhD, thanks all of those who so willingly and openly provided information and insights through one-on-one conversations, especially Gary Bass, PhD, and Karen Narasaki, JD, from the Census Subgroup, whose thoughtful reflections on a complicated endeavor were invaluable. She particularly appreciates the overall guidance and direction provided by RWJF Senior Program Officer, Carolyn Miller, MA, MS.



# I. The Census: Fundamental to Equity and Inclusion

**T**he decennial census, mandated by the United States Constitution, is a critical component of American government and fundamental to the fair functioning of American democracy. Every 10 years, starting in 1790, the census strives to count “the whole number of persons in each state.” Enslaved Black people were counted as three-fifths of a person until after the Civil War, and the 1890 census was the first to attempt to count all Native Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The census was originally designed to count people so that seats in the House of Representatives could be apportioned according to population, a key purpose of the census to this day. The number of representatives in each state determines the number of Electoral College electors in each state (two per state for the two senators plus the number of Congressional representatives), with major implications for the presidential election. Census data are also used in configuring state legislative districts, and county, city, and school jurisdictional districts.

Today, in addition to a simple count, the census gathers data on age, race, ethnicity, and home ownership/rental. The U.S. Census Bureau also collects a much wider range of data (including education, employment, health, transportation, and other topics) from a sample of the population through the ongoing (annual) American Community Survey (ACS). Through these two collection efforts, “the U.S. Census Bureau provides the highest-quality data available about who we are as a nation,” according to the report *Philanthropy and the 2020 Census*.

Census data also drive the distribution of federal funds. In fact, a 2017 study<sup>3</sup> from the George Washington Institute of Public Policy found that 316 programs used 2010 census data to distribute \$1.5 trillion to state and local governments, businesses, and others.

Other significant uses of census data include:

- Enforcement of the U.S. Voting Rights Act and equal protection in, e.g., education, employment, healthcare, housing
- Economic and social research

<sup>2</sup>Buchanan R. “[Stand Up and Be Counted: Native Americans in the Federal Census.](#)” *National Archives News*, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, April 21, 2022.

<sup>3</sup>Reamer *Brief 7: Comprehensive Accounting of Census-Guided Federal Spending (FY2017)*. Washington, DC: George Washington Institute of Public Policy, George Washington University, February 2020.

- Community planning for services ranging from education and public health to infrastructure and employment
- Economic development decisionmaking by a wide range of businesses.

Census data, thus, thread throughout American life and have enormous impacts on fair representation in government and the fair distribution of resources. If the census is incomplete or inaccurate, it is difficult to achieve equity in health, education, housing, and many other areas of day-to-day life.

Fully and accurately counting marginalized populations—people of color (especially Black, Latino, and Native American people), immigrants, and young children—has historically been difficult, as distrust of the government and lack of information about the census have prevented many from engaging with it. But in 2020, several issues posed particular challenges for achieving a complete and accurate count:

- Inadequate funding. Congress initially stipulated that funding for the 2020 census would be at the 2010 level, despite increased population and other demands on the count;
- Policy issues related to the continuance of the ACS, revisions to race and ethnicity questions, and others;
- A move to a census that would be primarily online for the first time;
- A proposal by the Trump administration that a question about citizenship and immigration status be added to the census.

These challenges, along with lessons learned from the experience of the 2010 census, prompted a group of 10 foundations—mostly members of the Democracy Funders Collaborative—to take action beginning in 2015 to help ensure a complete and accurate count in the 2020 census.



## II. Philanthropy Comes Together

### FORMING THE CENSUS SUBGROUP

In 2015, a group of 10 foundations, most of which were participants in the Democracy Funders Collaborative, came together to address concerns about the upcoming 2020 census. The Bauman Foundation had long supported initiatives addressing democracy and economic justice. Gary Bass, PhD (Bauman's executive director emeritus) took the lead on researching and developing ideas for the group and became its chair. With extensive Washington experience, Dr. Bass was a national expert on government transparency and accountability.

Dr. Bass interviewed census experts and leaders from civil rights organizations, local government, and foundations. He also reviewed the experience of funders who had supported the 2010 census through the [Funders Census Initiative](#), a working group of the [Funders' Committee for Civic Participation](#), an organization serving philanthropies committed to equity in the democratic process. In a memo to the group of foundations, Dr. Bass concluded that: "(I)t is nearly certain that an investment by foundation leaders to support a fair and accurate census will yield a huge return to improve U.S. democracy, ensuring a more complete count of each person as required by the Constitution."

### CRAFTING A PLAN OF ACTION

The funders created the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup ("the Census Subgroup;" "the Subgroup") and in November 2015, approved a Plan of Action to guide its work. The plan, which became fundamental to the Subgroup's work and success, established three key priorities:

- **Policy improvements** to both the decennial census and the American Community Survey to ensure adequate federal funding and sound strategic federal decisionmaking.
- **Outreach and increased support** by leveraging the contributions of the Census Subgroup and pulling in other funders and sectors.
- **Public outreach and education** to improve census response—called "Get Out the Count"—especially among traditionally undercounted populations.

Said Dr. Bass, "If there was a secret sauce, it was in keeping the Plan of Action to three simple points. It was an incredibly complex operation, with lots of surprises along the way that forced us to recalibrate and bring new elements to the table. So, we had to keep a fairly streamlined, simple approach and the Plan of Action was designed to be that."

Collaboration was central to the work from the beginning. When developing the Plan of Action, Dr. Bass consulted multiple groups and experts for design advice, ran a draft plan by them, and incorporated their edits. Overall, said Dr. Bass, “Getting agreement on the Plan of Action was remarkably smooth.”

## STAFFING THE SUBGROUP

The Bauman Foundation supported Dr. Bass’s considerable time that he devoted to the Subgroup, and Bauman staff helped behind the scenes. The foundation had not previously made census-related grants, but the area was close to its mission and Bauman leadership had connections with other foundations that made it easy “to get the ball rolling,” said Dr. Bass.

A key addition was Karen Narasaki, JD, who was hired as a consultant to Bauman and spent much of her time working with Dr. Bass and the Subgroup on the census. Ms. Narasaki is a nationally renowned civil rights lawyer who brought invaluable, extensive experience with prior censuses, as well as relationships with key players. She is the past president and executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC and was a member of the Census Decennial Advisory Council.

## CREATING THE CENSUS SUBGROUP MODEL

### INFRASTRUCTURE FOR 2020

Fundamental to the Subgroup’s success, according to Dr. Bass, was “pausing at the beginning to think about how to create a flexible structure that wouldn’t be intrusive on organizations that have ongoing operations.” The Census Subgroup was not designed to be a long-lasting entity—and steered away from branding itself as such—but one that would get through the census cycle. “We thought we would be there for a short period of time and gone, and that it was smarter to support groups that were going to be around,” said Dr. Bass. “We came up with this model that had a place for the funders and a place for the grantees and a lot of interaction between the two.”

Key to the Subgroup’s work was its two-track approach for distributing philanthropic funds:

- A **pooled fund** that gathered funder contributions and made grants guided by the Subgroup. This fund, managed by the [New Venture Fund](#) (a Washington-based fiscal sponsor), could make grants more quickly and get funds to appropriate organizations more efficiently than most funders could manage on their own.
- **Aligned funding**, through which funders’ direct grants were coordinated by the Subgroup to help ensure consistency with shared objectives. Not all funders were comfortable making grants to a shared pool; this option allowed them to participate in a way that worked for them.

An early decision was to provide grant support to the Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation, which relaunched its Funders Census Initiative from 2010. Its goal was to engage with state and local funders and to the [United Philanthropy Forum](#) to educate its network of over 90 philanthropy-serving organizations about the census and rally their support of census-related policy work. These two coalitions engaged with funders, while the Subgroup set strategy, managed the pooled fund, and aligned grantmaking.

On the nonprofit side, the Subgroup worked closely with the Leadership Conference Education Fund, [NALEO Educational Fund](#), and [Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC](#) to create an entity called Census Counts. This group was engaged in the Get Out the Count component of the census work. All three organizations were led by strong leaders who brought strategic and technical expertise to Census Counts.

Various vehicles allowed for rapid communication among all participants. On the nonprofit side State Counts Action Network (SCAN) was the mechanism that ensured that local, state, and national nonprofit groups were “all reading from the same hymnal and speaking in the same voice,” said Dr. Bass. (SCAN continues in operation, with about 200 separate organizations in 46 states engaged in ongoing census work.) Along with the structure for the funder world described above, “We could get something around the country really quickly,” Dr. Bass stressed.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE LONG TERM**

The infrastructure-building was intentional, according to Ms. Narasaki, with the aim to build capacity for the longer term. State and local infrastructure built for the census was also used for COVID-19 relief, with South Carolina as one example. In another, the state of Arkansas and others are using their census infrastructure to work on broadband access. “Wherever you need a public/private partnership, or you need to utilize trusted community voices,” said Ms. Narasaki, “that is where you can learn from the census work or build on what was built for the census.”

### **SUBGROUP MEMBERSHIP**

The Census Subgroup started with 10 foundations:

- Annie Casey Foundation
- Bauman Foundation
- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Democracy Fund
- Ford Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- JPB Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- Wallace H. Coulter Foundation

It was clear to the Subgroup that more than a handful of committed funders would be required to make the significant impact needed to result in an accurate and complete count in 2020. Concerted outreach efforts to other funders were made by Subgroup members, led by Ford Foundation President Darren Walker.

The easiest foundations to attract were the democracy funders, who already had some commitment to issues related to the census and did not need much convincing. “It got harder

as you moved to place-based or issue-based funders like RWJF,” said Dr. Bass. “There was a lot more tentativeness about engaging.”

In time, eight other foundations joined the Subgroup:

- The California Endowment
- Heising-Simons Foundation
- James Irvine Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Unbound Philanthropy
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation





## III. RWJF Embraces the Census Campaign

### APPRECIATING THE CENSUS/HEALTH EQUITY CONNECTION

**F**ormer RWJF Program Officer Matthew Trujillo, PhD, and Senior Program Officer Andrea Ducas, MPH, had observed Census Subgroup meetings during its post-launch period in 2016 and subsequently sent an email to RWJF staff with information about the census initiative and asking if anyone might be interested in following up. Senior Program Officer Carolyn Miller, MA, MS, from RWJF's Research-Evaluation-Learning (REL) unit was interested. Ms. Miller was previously in government survey work and had interned at the Census Bureau earlier in her career.

Gary Bass called RWJF the “poster child” for issue-based engagement. “They came into it with a lot of hesitancy.” At first, Dr. Bass suggested that RWJF staff attend the Subgroup meetings, without any financial commitment. Ms. Miller began to attend and eventually pointed out that there were no rules for the committee. She, Dr. Bass, and another colleague wrote rules that stressed equality among members. “It didn’t matter how much money you gave, you only had one vote. And votes were taken only when there wasn’t a real consensus,” said Dr. Bass.

While interested, at first it was not clear to Ms. Miller what the connection would be for RWJF with its focus on health and healthcare. Through multiple conversations with Dr. Bass and other Subgroup members, a path emerged. Ms. Miller began to recognize that an inaccurate census would negatively impact the population groups that RWJF supports and that an accurate census would further health equity and help ensure that marginalized groups would not be disadvantaged for the next decade. Thus, the census could be considered fundamental to the Foundation’s work. “We realized how the communities we care about are the ones most at risk for undercounts and for losing voice and representation if the census doesn’t achieve a full, fair, and accurate count,” she explained in *Philanthropy and the 2020 Census* ([Appendix B](#)).

RWJF Associate Vice President of REL, Brian Quinn, PhD, attended a meeting in Washington hosted by the Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and several others from the Subgroup. It was an opportunity to learn from other funders, as well as experts and former census directors. At the meeting, the potential risks of an inaccurate census also became clear to Dr. Quinn, not only for democracy, “but also for some of the issues that relate very closely to RWJF’s interests.” He was struck by conversations at the meeting about the importance of the census for a range of equity and social justice issues—issues gaining momentum at the Foundation at that time.

Many of the other involved foundations were there as a result of their strategic democracy priorities. For RWJF, accurate census data are important for the many research projects conducted by its grantees, and an accurate count has major implications for federal funding of the public programs that impact the populations served by its grantees. “This became the angle we started to take as we had conversations internally about why the census and why we wanted to get involved,” said Dr. Quinn. “Those explanations resonated with our colleagues. We were able to move forward with encouragement that this was something we would do, even though we had not done any of this work in the past.” At the same time, he said, some exchanges with grantees had surfaced that indicated interest in the census. So, there was something of a “bottom-up” piece as well.

Discussions took place at senior staff meetings about the potential of the census work and why RWJF was getting involved. Initially, funding was limited—a couple hundred thousand dollars, which typically would not have generated much attention. But there was recognition that this “was something new, something potentially risky, and something that had cross-cutting appeal,” Dr. Quinn explained. “The rationale about the data piece and the public programs piece really was helpful for their understanding about why we were getting involved.”

While staff was aware of the political controversy surrounding the 2020 census and the risk it could pose, Dr. Quinn believes they felt the risks were mitigated by the structure of RWJF’s

“The Subgroup had done a lot of the heavy lifting for us. It allowed us to be much more efficient in our engagement.”

involvement, with the Foundation contributing to the collaborative as one of many funders. “The Subgroup had done a lot of the heavy lifting for us,” he explained. “It allowed us to be much more efficient in our engagement.”

RWJF contributed to the pooled fund and also to individual projects. But “it wasn’t a strategic priority for us,” Dr. Quinn stated. “We weren’t going to start a census team to do the legwork and investigation and analysis. The strategy of the Subgroup became our strategy in some ways.”

Michelle Larkin, JD, MS, RN, RWJF’s vice president, Program Management, also noted that the pooling of resources from multiple funders was a factor in RWJF getting involved in the Subgroup. “It allowed us to have greater impact and we weren’t unintentionally working at cross purposes,” she said. Ms. Larkin acknowledged the risk of being viewed as partisan when supporting an initiative that a political party may be against. “But we always ground our decisions on what is the impact on health,” she emphasized.

Recognizing the critical importance of census data to the flow of federal dollars to states and then to counties and local areas, she was clear that flow is “super-important to health and to the ability to deliver healthcare and to understand the population of a state and what their needs may be. The census provides the data that actually determine how those resources flow for health. That was the main driver as we think about building a Culture of Health grounded in health equity.” Quality data are central to building a Culture of Health, and “We’ve always been based in evidence and science,” Ms. Larkin stressed. The vision of a Culture of Health with a focus on equity requires an understanding of the intersectionality of different systems, and among those, said Ms. Larkin, “The data system in particular has become an area that we pay attention to.”

There was intentionality in how RWJF became involved in the census. “We looked at where there were gaps, where additional attention was needed, and where we could be most helpful,” Ms. Larkin explained. “That’s how we make those decisions. We want to understand the context we’re walking into. If we’re disrupting, we want to be sure we’re disrupting intentionally.”

In 2017, the Foundation joined the Subgroup.

### **BRINGING A FRESH PERSPECTIVE**

RWJF brought a fresh perspective to the work of the Census Subgroup, said Ms. Narasaki. RWJF is not a civil rights or democracy funder but offered ideas in the health arena that were critical since health professionals are trusted voices. For example, young children are an undercounted group and health providers are trusted and influential information sources for parents. RWJF was a health funder saying to other health funders, “This is why you need to care, why you need to let your network know and get [census] information into doctors’ offices and clinics,” as Ms. Narasaki described it. This is also the case for providers who serve other underrepresented communities. “It was very important to have that voice.”

From Dr. Bass’s perspective, the Subgroup was helping the Foundation “connect how an issue like health equity dovetails with and is shaped by census data. And we were learning from them how important getting accurate census data is to a number of issue-based players. Our job was to try to explain that, and RWJF was helping us to do that.” He found that this line of thinking and explanation was also helpful for place-based funders and for nonprofits. To draw them in, they required a clear explanation of how an accurate and complete census count is essential to their mission and work.

All told, Dr. Bass said, “RWJF [became] one of the larger funders.”

### **MAKING GRANTS IN SUPPORT OF THE CENSUS**

Once it committed to the 2020 census campaign, RWJF made a range of grants between 2017 and 2020 to the pooled fund and through aligned direct grantmaking to organizations involved in census work, as well as funding directed to New Jersey. This support totaled \$11,507,000.

#### **POOLED FUND GRANTMAKING**

Starting in 2017, **RWJF made four grants totaling \$2,807,000 to the pooled fund** managed by the New Venture Fund. Of this, \$1.95 million was drawn from the \$6 million Census 2020 authorization. (The establishment of an authorization was indicative of RWJF’s commitment to the census. It allowed for a quicker distribution of funds and associated multiple grants into one body of work.) In addition, **it made one grant of \$750,000 in 2020 specifically directed at COVID-19 pandemic support**. These grants were managed by Research-Evaluation-Learning.

#### **DIRECT GRANTMAKING**

In addition to its grants to the pooled fund, RWJF made grants directly to specific organizations involved in the 2020 census. “We started to build a little momentum,” said Dr. Quinn, “and began to consider other things we could do outside the auspices of the Subgroup. But the whole thing was very ad hoc, and it did not feel like there was ever a master plan.”

### *Grants to Support Communications*

Senior Communications Officer Brent Thompson, MPA, managed two grants to the National League of Cities. **The first grant of \$2 million helped the League provide technical assistance to cities as they were mounting their census outreach campaigns.** Through this regranteeing program, the National League of Cities regranted funds to 187 organizations in every region of the country. These included grants to nonprofits, cities, towns, libraries, tribal governments, and others. Grantees were focused on historically undercounted communities: racial and ethnic minorities, low-income households, immigrants, children under age 5, renters and residents who move often, non-English speakers, single parents, migrant workers, and others. Grants ranged from under \$5,000 to \$40,000. **The second grant of \$750,000 helped to continue this work in the COVID-19 pandemic environment.**

Through the regrantees, cities built infrastructure for outreach and engagement around the census. “That infrastructure could be maintained rather than allowed to go dormant and then have to be recreated for the next 10 years,” Mr. Thompson stressed. He noted that the National League of Cities is thinking just that way. A key takeaway of their 2020 census experience, he said, is that “it is not in anybody’s best interest to do this fresh every 10 years.”

To help increase the count of the Latino population specifically, **RWJF made a \$1 million grant from the Census 2020 authorization to Univision Communications to support its census campaign, Cuenta Conmigo (Count With Me)**, which educated and encouraged its audience on the importance of participating in the 2020 census. A comparison of census participation rates, provided by the U.S. Census Bureau in six states (Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas) showed that participation in the census increased an average of 25.8 percent from April 1, 2020, to September 29, 2020. While this increase may not be wholly attributable to Univision’s work, the company believes that “it is reasonable to assume that Univision’s nationwide efforts played a role in this increase, especially given the sizable Hispanic population found in these specific states,” according to a report by Univision to RWJF.

**RWJF also made a grant of \$150,000 to the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School** to support the center’s coverage of health equity research and its hiring of a data visualization journalist to focus on the health equity implications of the 2020 census.

### *Grants to Support Get Out the Count*

The organization referred to as the Leadership Conference includes two branches. The [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) is a 501(c)(4) organization founded in 1950 as the lobbying arm of the Civil Rights Movement. The [Leadership Conference Education Fund](#), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, was established in 1969 as the public education arm of the Leadership Conference. “Ensuring a fair and accurate census is a top priority for the Leadership Conference and our coalition of more than 200 organizations,” said Corinne Yu, JD, senior advisor to the president and interim executive vice president of campaigns and programs. The Leadership Conference had been involved in the 2010 census and began to get ready mid-cycle for 2020 and actively fundraise in the hope that it could expand its reach.

The Leadership Conference has a standing census task force comprised of organizations both within and outside its coalition. The task force functions between censuses and is co-chaired with NALEO Educational Fund and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC.

The 2010 census campaign led by the task force of the Leadership Conference Education Fund and its partners was the most comprehensive and broad-based campaign at the time other than that of the Census Bureau itself. An evaluation of the 2010 experience strongly recommended that funders get involved earlier in the cycle for future censuses. That recommendation was stressed to Dr. Bass at the Census Subgroup and, Ms. Yu believes, “was a major impetus in the organizing that was done on the philanthropy side.”

In 2020 the task force knew it was facing multiple challenges, such as distrust of government, the new online option, lack of adequate funding, the attempt to introduce a citizenship question, and privacy and confidentiality issues. “We knew we had an important role to play,” Ms. Yu stressed. And, of course, the pandemic presented the greatest challenge.

The 2020 campaign was called Get Out the Count. **RWJF helped to fund the campaign through a grant to the Leadership Conference Education Fund of \$2.25 million**—support that “really helped expand our reach,” said Ms. Yu. Research-Evaluation-Learning managed this grant. The funding provided by RWJF and others enabled the task force to hire a full-time director and team for the Get Out the Count campaign and to leverage a new infrastructure, Census Counts, that included more organizations from the Leadership Conference coalition taking on campaign roles and expanding beyond the civil rights community.

Meeta Anand, JD, now senior director for Census and Data Equity at the Leadership Conference, had previously led New York Counts 2020, which was the New York State coalition of nonprofits working toward a fair and accurate census. Materials from the task force and its State Count Action Network enabled her to leverage the funds available in New York and build a campaign there. Ms. Anand believes that New York’s campaign was successful “because we had this entire infrastructure that we could lean into and build upon.”

Ms. Yu pointed to something of a silver lining in all of the significant 2020 challenges. “They helped to increase interest in the census and to mobilize organizations and individuals around the census. There was a lot of press coverage, so people knew about all of these challenges, and that helped raise awareness and helped us with encouraging robust participation.”

**To extend the network of organizations “getting out the count,” RWJF also made a grant managed by REL of \$500,000 to Faith in Action** to strengthen and engage its multifaith, multiracial national base to work toward a full, fair, and accurate count in the 2020 census. With funding from RWJF, Faith in Action designed and implemented a nationwide census education program tailored to hard-to-count Black and Brown communities.

### *Grants to Support Legal Challenges*

The [Brennan Center for Justice](#) is an independent, nonpartisan law and policy organization focused on reforming and defending democracy and justice systems in the United States. While the Brennan Center had some involvement with the 2010 census, it was much more programmatically involved in 2020, with a five-member team working full-time at its peak, according to Deputy Director, Democracy, Thomas Wolf, JD, who founded and led the team.

In 2019, RWJF was referred to the Brennan Center by the Census Subgroup as a potential census-related grantee. **RWJF made two grants (\$550,000 from the Census 2020 authorization and a \$250,000 ad hoc grant) to the Brennan Center** between 2019 and

2021 to support its work providing legal and policy expertise in the effort to ensure the quality and integrity of the 2020 census. Both grants were managed by REL.

One of the main drivers for nonparticipation in the census is the concern that one's data might be used by other government agencies for negative purposes, such as prosecution. The Leadership Conference asked the Brennan Center to do legal research on the confidentiality protection that exists for people's census data and assess the strength of this protection and what could be done if this protection were breached.

One of the main drivers for nonparticipation in the census is the concern that one's data might be used by other government agencies for negative purposes, such as prosecution.

There was also concern that various kinds of legal action might be needed to safeguard the census, and the Leadership Conference created a Legal Strategy Task force, which it led with the Brennan Center, to coordinate efforts among litigation groups. The task force convened litigators to pay attention to the census and plan litigation. When issues arose, members could pool views on a legal attack. The group also organized amicus campaigns to support major census cases. "That work is very diplomatic and political," said

Mr. Wolf, "in that you're trying to identify all the key stakeholders, harmonize their messages, and then encourage them to participate in the cases as friends of the court."

The Brennan Center team's work grew as different threats manifested. The first was the citizenship question, along with the confidentiality issue, and then the Trump Administration's attempts to exclude undocumented people from the apportionment count and to accelerate the actual counting process in summer 2020. The Center conducted legal and policy research, filed a number of amicus briefs and coordinated others, filed lawsuits, and was co-lead counsel for the lawsuit that stopped the attempts to rush the census.

The Brennan Center was one of several organizations that established the Census Quality Reinforcement Taskforce (CQR), which is a network of about 250 civil rights organizers and attorneys, stenographers and statisticians, political scientists, communications experts, and others. Mr. Wolf described the CQR as "a really big table to bring all different kinds of stakeholders together to think through where the threats and opportunities facing the census are." The CQR is housed at the National Conference on Citizenship and has its own co-directors.

### ***Grants to Support New Jersey's Census Count: A Mini Case Study***

RWJF has a special commitment to providing a range of support in New Jersey, its home state, and staff sought to do something specific to assist the New Jersey census count. What emerged was a state-level model very much like that of the Census Subgroup.

The [Fund for New Jersey](#) is a private grantmaking foundation that supports policy and advocacy work in the state of New Jersey. Its focus is on "making New Jersey a better and more racially just, more economically just place to live," said President Kiki Jamieson, PhD. In 2017, while conducting research on redistricting, fund staff realized the connection between the census and redistricting. The fund had not previously been involved in census work but



in December 2017, fund trustees allocated \$100,000 to begin to investigate what the fund could do with regard to the census.

By attending Census Subgroup meetings and talking with people in other states, it became clear, said Dr. Jamieson, “that this needed to be a really robust effort, ideally involving nonprofits, philanthropies, governments, other civic players, business, and so on.”

The fund began to take the steps that would lead to New Jersey Counts, the state’s census initiative. Key to this was data analysis that produced maps of hard-to-count populations by state legislative districts, Congressional districts, and demographic categories. These were used to educate nonprofits, foundations, and legislators about the importance of getting a complete count in the census. “That was the underpinning for the whole effort,” said Dr. Jamieson. Over several months of this educational campaign a steering committee emerged comprised of organizations with ties to historically undercounted populations or areas. Advocates for Children of New Jersey took on leadership of this coalition.

Dr. Jamieson met RWJF’s Matthew Trujillo while attending Census Subgroup meetings. At the time, RWJF was not involved in New Jersey census funding. “I started making the case to him that there was a lot to be done in New Jersey and it would be great if RWJF wanted to join the fund in doing this.” After Dr. Jamieson’s discussions with Trujillo and then with Carolyn Miller, **the Foundation made a grant of \$500,000 to the Fund for New Jersey**, which was managed by REL. “We’d never done that before,” said Dr. Jamieson. “We’re our own private foundation; we’re not in the business of taking grants from other foundations.”

But this arrangement made sense for everyone. “It allowed us to be far more nimble, responsive, flexible, and creative about how to tackle this,” said Dr. Jamieson. As result of

For foundations whose trustees were not comfortable being part of a pooled fund, an aligned funding system was also available.

RWJF’s support, New Jersey Counts was able to start with a pooled fund, and “it was helpful to not only have the Fund for New Jersey talking about this, but to have a couple of foundations endorsing the idea.”

The funds provided by RWJF and the Fund for New Jersey were especially important because they were there early in the process and made it easier for other funders to participate. Since other funders were not comfortable contributing directly to a private foundation, a second pooled fund was housed at the Princeton

Area Community Foundation, which was an easier fund transfer vehicle for those foundations. Both pooled funds were directed by the Fund for New Jersey, which used money from each as needed to meet the overall budget.

For foundations whose trustees were not comfortable being part of a pooled fund, an aligned funding system was also available. Dr. Jamieson would match a foundation’s contribution to the needs of different nonprofits and then fill gaps through the pooled funds.

Ultimately, 20 funders contributed through pooled, as well as aligned funding. In addition, \$9.5 million of state appropriations were directed to the census as a result of advocacy fueled by the original maps that helped legislators understand why investing in a complete count would benefit everybody in New Jersey.



It was all part of a “larger, well-coordinated statewide plan,” said Dr. Jamieson. “We had great transparency and communication among the nonprofit sector, the philanthropic sector, the secretary of state’s office, and the Census Bureau’s regional office.” Private money was not used to replicate state funding but to fill in where the state couldn’t spend money.

Some foundation boards were concerned that funding the census might be viewed as political. Dr. Jamieson was able to counter that effectively by sticking with the facts—why the count is important to the people of New Jersey, who is most affected by an inaccurate count, the need for accuracy and fairness, and the enormous amount of federal dollars that would result from an accurate count and benefit everyone in the state.

Dr. Jamieson views this as “one of the best examples of how New Jersey’s foundation, nonprofit, and government sectors work together.” The results were “so good,” she said, “we outperformed the Census Bureau’s estimates.”

Another benefit to the broad and diverse set of players were the many opportunities for relationship- and trust-building that offered potential for collaborative efforts on other issues.

Another benefit to the broad and diverse set of players were the many opportunities for relationship- and trust-building that offered potential for collaborative efforts on other issues. For example, many organizations involved in the census later became engaged in redistricting.

RWJF’s funding was used where it was needed: communications, outreach, translation, and organizing. Having the Foundation involved was critical in another way. Its role “as an influencer was very, very important—particularly for other foundations,” Dr. Jamieson stressed. The Fund for New Jersey has a reputation for supporting issues that other foundations might shy away from.

“RWJF’s reputation is a bit more conservative and very thoughtful. When RWJF decides to invest in something, it’s something that is seriously worthy of investment.”

**Post-census, RWJF has contributed \$250,000 to a pooled fund that the Fund for New Jersey set up at the Princeton Area Community Foundation to support fair redistricting.**

Looking forward to the 2030 census and other civic endeavors, Dr. Jamieson is working to evolve the coalition established for the census into a statewide civic engagement coalition. She believes that if funders are in the habit of supporting a civic engagement framework “it wouldn’t be a heavy lift to get them to support the census.” She emphasized how important RWJF’s early support was, both financially and given RWJF’s reputation to help influence other funders. “Having RWJF as an early partner was absolutely priceless.”



## IV. The Census Subgroup Takes Action

### FOCUS ON POLICY

Concerned about Congressional constraints on census appropriations, the Subgroup made policy its first priority. Congress was requiring that spending for 2020 not exceed that of 2010, which was about \$12 billion to \$13 billion. Concerted advocacy resulted in increased federal funding for the Census Bureau and 2020 census for each of three fiscal years (FY 2018 through FY 2020) beyond the more limited amounts requested by the Trump administration.<sup>4</sup> Advocates were coordinated by the Hill Strategy Group, a coalition representing a range of interested parties. (For more information on this effort, see [Census Appropriations Advocacy: A Surgical Strategy](#).)

Other policy concerns included:

- Counting incarcerated people with their prison location as their residence instead of their residence prior to incarceration (called “prison gerrymandering”)—an issue which can lead to overrepresentation of communities with large numbers of people in local prisons and underrepresentation of the home communities of the people incarcerated in those prisons.
- A question championed by the Trump administration asking about citizenship status. This had been a longstanding goal of right-wing activists and would have had a potentially devastating effect on Latino and immigrant communities.
- Calls by some members of the House of Representatives for the elimination of the American Community Survey or making it voluntary. The funders believed this would have a major negative effect on the quality of data available to policymakers, decisionmakers, and researchers.
- Revisions to census questions on race and ethnicity.
- Use of government administrative records, such as those from SNAP, Medicaid, Medicare, and other programs, to confirm addresses and infer nonrespondent data.
- Conducting a mostly internet-based census for the first time. The Subgroup was worried about both the Census Bureau’s readiness to implement an online census and about the potential for undercount in communities lacking reliable internet access.

<sup>4</sup>In June 2021, the U.S. Government Accountability Office [reported](#) that the Census Bureau estimate for the actual cost of the 2020 census would be about \$14.2 billion.

## **SPREADING RESOURCES THROUGH A NATIONAL HUB NETWORK**

An important funding strategy was the national hubs strategy, which emerged through conversations between the funders and multiple players. This was a way to distribute funds, materials, and other resources quickly to communities across the country. The hubs operated at many different levels:

National hubs included organizations such as American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee; Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC; Leadership Conference Education Fund/Census Counts Campaign; NAACP; NALEO Educational Fund; National Congress of American Indians; National LGBTQ Task Force; National Urban League; United We Dream; and others. (For detail on the national hubs, see [Reflections on the 2020 Census National Hub Reports Project](#).)

- State, regional, and city hubs were a connection point for planning, learning, and coordinating.
- Philanthropy-serving organizations built private-public partnerships at the state and local levels with government for Get Out the Count.
- Some hubs were directed to specific populations, such as people with lower incomes, or specific issues, such as illiteracy or translation of census materials.

“We were trying to reach as many different kinds of communities in as many different directions as we could and where possible, do it in an intersectional way,” said Karen Narasaki.

Throughout, there was a goal of minimizing duplication of effort and of consistent messaging through people learning from each other about the best message framing. And, added Ms. Narasaki, it was not just top down but also bottom up, “which became incredibly important when the pandemic threw a monkey wrench into everything” right before the April 1 Census Day launch. As the Census Bureau changed timelines and well-organized in-person plans were thrown into disarray, “it was very important for people to be able to go to a place where they knew they would get accurate information.” The many hubs throughout the country were that place. (For more on the pandemic response, see [Section V, Thrown by the Pandemic](#), below.)

## **EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION TO INFORM FUTURE CENSUSES**

An evaluation subcommittee was formed early in the process, chaired by Angela Cheng, MPA, senior program officer at the JPB Foundation. The approach was primarily a process evaluation and a documentation of what happened, with lessons and challenges to guide future censuses. The scope of the census campaign was quite large, including not just the national funders in the Census Subgroup, but also state and local funders; national, state, and local nonprofit organizations; and other groups of different kinds. In defining an evaluation framework, the evaluation committee focused on the collaborative as a whole and as a process and not about specific grantees. It was never meant to be an impact evaluation, according to Ms. Cheng.

What resulted was a series of state-by-state case studies or vignettes along with a national evaluation around the funder experience as the best way to capture the complexity of what had happened. (For much detail on the evaluative work performed, see the list of reports in the Evaluation section of the [Appendix](#).)

## SUPPORTING THE CAMPAIGN IN MULTIPLE WAYS

In addition to financial support, the involvement of philanthropy in the census is important for practical reasons, according to Ms. Narasaki. For example:

- Foundations have stature within their communities of influence and can help rally elected officials and others in state and local government agencies.
- Philanthropies can leverage their relationships with business leaders to engage them in census education and other support.

And philosophically, in Dr. Bass's view, philanthropy has a responsibility to deal with what many today consider a crisis in democracy. "Philanthropy has an important role in trying to navigate and build a stronger and better multiracial democracy than what was before," he believes. Dr. Bass recognizes that whatever action a foundation may take, it may be accused of being partisan, which can prevent foundation boards and leadership from taking action. Yet, the presence of philanthropy, in his view, can help reduce partisanship. "It was incredibly important that philanthropy played this role" in the 2020 census campaign, he stressed. But it was not easy to overcome funder concerns and get them involved.

Yet, once foundations got involved, their contributions went far beyond the financial.

For example, the first policy issue addressed by the Subgroup was prison gerrymandering, where people in prison are counted as residents in the prison location and not at their home address, which has enormous implications for their home communities. In August 2016, the Subgroup was able to obtain signatures from 35 foundation leaders on a [letter](#) to the Census Bureau asking that this rule be changed. (Dr. Bass emphasized that this was rulemaking, not lobbying, and, as such, permissible for a private foundation to engage in.) "This wasn't about grantmaking. It was about engaging political power," Dr. Bass emphasized.

"We were able to convince [funders] that this was the moment in time where you've got to get involved."

Another example of using that power was the funder response to the citizenship question. With stakes so high, many funders who had sat on the sidelines jumped in. "We were able to convince them," said Dr. Bass, that "this is the moment in time where you've got to get involved." An August 2018 sign-on [letter](#) to the Department of Commerce addressing the citizenship question included over 300 CEO and trustee signatures from many different institutions. Later, when there was an administration move to shorten

the census collection period during the pandemic, a [letter](#) of protest to the Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau in August 2020 garnered 506 signatures, including those of leaders of philanthropy-serving organizations (see additional information in [Section V, Thrown by the Pandemic](#), below).

Many foundations contributed as influencers in a range of arenas. Foundations participated in local and state "complete count committees," which were created largely by governments and included businesses and nonprofits, and often chaired or were key players on these committees. Foundations also convened groups of nonprofits to help them think through their census approaches and activities. When COVID-19 hit, they shifted strategies and had the

flexibility to use funds in different ways to respond to the changing needs of organizations and communities. (For more on the pandemic response, see [Section V, Thrown by the Pandemic](#), below.)

Representatives from two early Subgroup member organizations reflected on the experience from a foundation perspective:

- An initial Subgroup member, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), has been involved with the census for a long time. Data from the census and from the American Community Survey inform where the foundation focuses its work and are essential in measuring the wellbeing of children presented in its KIDS COUNT® Data Book. In the 2020 census, its focus was the undercount of young children, the most undercounted of any age group. Different from the democracy-focused interests of most initial Subgroup members, AECF's presence helped pave the way for more issue-focused funders.
- AECF Senior Associate Florencia Gutierrez, MPA, MEd, was enthusiastic about funders and partner organizations working together toward a common goal. The hub organizations and partners described what was needed and the funders tried to make it happen. Ms. Gutierrez “really loved that collaboration and the fact that it wasn't siloed like it usually is. The way the national organizations supported the states and the work got to the ground was inspirational. The impact that we had was huge.” In 2010, AECF felt that it was on its own. With the 2020 census, said Ms. Gutierrez, “We had that Plan of Action and we were all there at the table.”

The interplay between funders and their nonprofit grantees working together could have been tense. This relationship can be a challenge to true collaboration since funders have the money and, therefore, the power. For Angela Cheng of the JPB Foundation, the 2020 census experience in this regard was different.

- The JPB Foundation also was part of the 2020 Census Subgroup from the start. JPB's mission centers on justice and opportunity for communities with lower incomes and communities of color, and it often works collaboratively with other foundations to draw on their expertise and knowledge and leverage JPB's funding. While such collaboration can foster community among funders, noted Ms. Cheng, given the power dynamic between funders and grantees, engaging both groups in this way doesn't typically happen, and it was a significant contributor to the campaign's success. This “common-ground anchoring” also had the benefit of allowing funders to directly experience how grantee partners interacted with each other and learn more about their work than might be available in a grant report, in some cases leading to ongoing support of grantees in noncensus projects.

In the end, the story of foundations' role in the 2020 census was, Dr. Bass said, “remarkable. Having started from a really tenuous ‘I don't want to get involved’ position, they were in with both feet.”



## V. Thrown by the Pandemic

Like most plans at the time, plans to increase census participation, which were very in-person-focused, were upended by the sudden impact of COVID-19 right at the start of the census period. (Since 1930, Census Day has been April 1.) National and community-based organizations, funders, state and local governments, and the Census Bureau itself had to adjust quickly to carry on with the census in a very different landscape.

### **EXTENDING THE COUNT AND DATA PROCESSING**

In response to the pandemic shutdown in March 2020, the Census Bureau extended the census count through October 31 (originally slated to end July 31). Congress introduced bills to extend deadlines for the Census Bureau to produce its official counts that would be used for reapportionment and redistricting. But in August 2020, the Commerce Department moved the count deadline back to September 30. The Census Bureau indicated concern about being able to fix data errors, and the media linked the time reduction to possible efforts by the Trump administration to influence apportionment numbers in the event that Trump lost the upcoming presidential election.

Philanthropy sprang into action. Within two days of this announcement, a letter signed by 506 philanthropic organizations highly concerned about data quality was sent to Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and Census Bureau Chief Steven Dillingham appealing to the Bureau to not rush the count and the associated data processing. At the same time, many funders wrote their own letters and reached out to the communities and partners they worked with to underscore the importance of a careful process.

A federal judge reinstated the October 31 end date, which was later changed to October 15 by the Supreme Court. The Census Bureau delayed apportionment data delivery and released it on April 16, 2021. In August and September 2021, all redistricting data was delivered to the states.

### **THE “COVID-19 PIVOT”**

Years of planning for in-person census outreach had to reorient immediately to digital engagement. Community groups developed online events such as town halls, dance parties, contests, and others; produced videos; set up phone banks; disseminated census information at food distribution sites, schools, and COVID testing facilities; and targeted advertising to historically undercounted populations. The impressive ability of these grantee organizations to pivot so quickly was likely a result of the flexibility of the support they received from their

funders that could be diverted to new purposes, generally with limited or no conditions or reporting requirements, as well as the relationships that funders and interested parties had built over months and years of preparing together for census outreach.

Funders helped in other ways: the Funders Census Initiative offered webinars; the Census Subgroup established a COVID-19 response committee and made “emergency grants” available for extra outreach in areas with low self-response; an additional round of grantmaking focused on digital organizing and activities; and regional, state, and local funders offered emergency funding and additional support to census grantees.

The timing of the pandemic could not have been worse for the census. But all of these efforts—by so many funders and interested parties in so many communities—helped to keep the census visible to the public and contributed to a greater level of participation than would have occurred otherwise during the pandemic.

### **RWJF RESPONDS TO COVID-19**

In response to the pandemic-imposed constraints on census outreach, RWJF reduced grant reporting requirements and made additional grants to assist with digital outreach and other support to interested parties. These included:

- **A grant of \$750,000 to the Subgroup’s pooled fund** “providing emergency support to the 2020 Census Project to mitigate challenges to an accurate count from the COVID-19 pandemic.”
- **A second grant to the National League of Cities of \$750,000** “providing supplemental support for municipalities to improve census results in historically undercounted communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.”





## VI. Census Campaign Accomplishments and Lessons

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### KEY CENSUS CAMPAIGN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**F**oundations worked together and with grantees with unprecedented ease and collaboration, and the relationships that developed enabled a set of important accomplishments.

Funder involvement and contributions exceeded expectations. By the end of the 2020 census effort:

- A total of 126 funders had made grants to 265 organizations.
- The total national philanthropic funding was at least \$117.9 million, which included:
- Pooled funding of \$53.2 million
- Direct (aligned) funding of at least \$64.7 million

In addition, state philanthropic funding totaled at least \$75.1 million

- Funders signed letters to the Census Bureau to express concern about key issues that could impede an accurate and complete count, such as prison gerrymandering, the citizenship question, and the shortening of the pandemic census collection period.

After much advocacy against the citizenship question and six lawsuits, the largest of which (New York) went to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court blocked the citizenship question in a 5 to 4 decision on June 27, 2019. (For more, see [The Fight Against the Citizenship Question: Ensuring Everyone Counts in the 2020 Census](#).)

When the pandemic shutdown hit two weeks before the April 1 Census Day, funders were instrumental in the “COVID-19 pivot,” quickly making additional grants, allowing great flexibility in the spending of grant funds, and limiting reporting requirements.

The self-response rate of 67 percent reported by the Census Bureau<sup>5</sup> was higher than the 66.5 percent rate in 2010, despite the impact of the pandemic, confusion sown by the push for a citizenship question, politicization of the census, heightened distrust of government, and other challenges.

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<sup>5</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. [2020 Census: Tracking Self-Response and Nonresponse Followup for Housing Units by State](#), October 28, 2020.

An infrastructure of national, state, and local funders; state and local governments; community organizations; and national and local groups was created. This collaboration not only was critical to the 2020 census and is being maintained in advance of the 2030 census, but can and has been tapped for a range of other civic engagement efforts—such as virus testing and vaccine distribution, broadband implementation, voting, and others.

## ESSENTIAL CAMPAIGN LESSONS

There is a great deal to be learned from the 2020 census campaign, but certain lessons are essential as the nation moves toward the 2030 census.

- **Start early.** Based on the advice of those involved with the 2010 census, the Subgroup started its work earlier than ever for the 2020 census—in 2016. It still wasn't early enough, according to Karen Narasaki. Dr. Bass noted that decisions about the 2030 census are being made currently, early in the decade. "By starting in 2016, we missed the possibility of influencing many decisions."

Educating foundations takes time, and then more time is needed for internal grantmaking decisions and board presentations and approval. "You have to start very early," Ms. Narasaki cautioned. She feels that one of the most important roles of the Subgroup was "sounding the alarm," letting everyone know that they should care—and why. While most issues are ongoing, the census is episodic; people who were around for the previous census may not be around for the next one. Re-education may be needed.

- **Recruit strong leaders.** The persuasive coalition-building experience brought by Dr. Bass and the deep census experience of Ms. Narasaki were priceless. They were critical to the success of the census campaign. Without their leadership, the prevailing view is that the whole experience would have been very different. In addition, strong leadership of Census Counts (from the Leadership Conference, NALEO, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC) was also vital to the effort. Leadership matters.
- **Create a clear Plan of Action with something for everyone.** To harness an extremely complex operation and draw in multiple players, the solution was a clear and simple Plan of Action, based on 2010 census experience and the knowledge and insight of census experts. The plan was easy to understand, yet offered an entrée for a range of funders and participants who came with varying interests, concerns, and perspectives.
- **Employ a reiterative process.** Recommendations were drafted and people were invited, in both one-on-one discussions and in group meetings, to make suggestions about what needed to be changed.
- **Recognize that funders fund in silos.** [Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality](#) was engaged to develop papers linking the census to areas of interest to different foundations—including health, women's reproductive rights, the environment, living with disability—describing how data get used for federal funding in individual areas. "That got people's attention," said Ms. Narasaki. (See the [Census 2020 page](#) of the Georgetown Center's Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative for a series of fact sheets and briefs on the importance of the census to different constituencies.)

- **Engage as many local funders as possible.** A key decision, according to Ms. Narasaki, was to address the concerns of state and local funders from the 2010 census when the national coalition provided funding to coalition member groups, which then sub-granted within their own networks. State and local funders did not like that arrangement as it interfered with local efforts and recipients were not always the most effective and trusted voices in that state or region.

For 2020, Ms. Narasaki said, “We made the decision to engage as many local funders as possible because there wasn’t going to be national funding that could cover the whole.” With increased state and local funder engagement, more money would go to where it was needed—to “boots on the ground and local trusted voices.”

The decision to focus on the state and local level in 2020 was significant, Ms. Narasaki believes. “Many local funders said they felt like they were a true partner. They were very engaged and a lot of trust was built.”

- **Provide multiple connecting points.** Just as RWJF saw the connections between the census and the Foundation’s strategic interests in data and public programs, said Brian Quinn, “Every large national foundation could, even if they’re not a ‘democracy funder,’ look at the census and find their niche, their toehold.” And there was a role for state and local funders as well. The ground game and trusted community voices, networks, and plans are important.
- **Allow funders to be “census-curious.”** A number of foundations, including RWJF, were in a learning mode for some time before making a funding commitment. No initial commitment was required to be part of discussions and the process. Funders could develop trust in the process and the information they received, as well as understand they would have a say in how funds were used before they committed.
- **Build an infrastructure to provide technical assistance and training to national and local funders.** Even national funders, let alone local funders, don’t have a census portfolio or staff with census expertise. Boards must be convinced that their money will be spent wisely and be leveraged for the most good. Small funders need to feel that their grants will be part of something bigger.
- Staff from the Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation helped program officers make the case to their boards. Program officers from different foundations shared their board materials, the data they used, and the approaches and arguments that worked best.
- **For the next census, support the infrastructure that has been created.** “It is cheaper than trying to recreate it, even if it could be recreated,” said Dr. Bass.
- **Consider using the census infrastructure for other campaigns and civic engagement.** This infrastructure has been used for COVID-19 testing and vaccine delivery (South Carolina), for implementing broadband distribution (Arkansas), and other public education-focused initiatives.



## VII. RWJF 2020 Impact and Takeaways

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### **RWJF'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE 2020 CENSUS CAMPAIGN**

RWJF's impact on the 2020 census campaign was multipart and significant:

- Its total financial investment of just over \$11.5 million made it one of the largest donors to this effort.
- Its reputation added weight to the outreach work of the Census Subgroup, the Fund for New Jersey, and the other organizations it supported.
- As an issue-based funder, the Foundation provided an example to issue-based, place-based, and other nondemocracy funders of the connection between the missions of those organizations and the census.
- The process of attracting the Foundation to the Census Subgroup afforded the Subgroup with the opportunity to learn best ways to draw in other issue-based funders.
- The inclusion of RWJF as a member of the Subgroup brought the knowledge, insight, and experience of RWJF's Program staff to Subgroup discussions and decisionmaking.
- As the largest healthcare foundation in the United States, RWJF offered an entrée to the health field for those deep into the census and can continue to educate other health funders about the importance of the census and the American Community Survey.

### **2020 TAKEAWAYS FOR RWJF**

The experience with the 2020 census was a new one for RWJF. Reflection on that experience offers a range of takeaway insights and ideas that can guide RWJF's consideration of future involvement in the census, American Community Survey, and other forms of civic engagement.

- **The census is foundational to the Culture of Health.** Census participation is an activity of civic engagement, and civic engagement is a pillar of the Culture of Health Action Area: [Making Health a Shared Value](#). "The Culture of Health is all-encompassing, and so it's hard to argue that these issues are not related to the Culture of Health," stressed Brian Quinn. "From a strategic standpoint, that's one of the benefits of the huge breadth of the Culture of Health, where anything goes, and you can make a strong case about the issues of social justice and democracy in light of our work. It enables us to think more expansively about what we do in support of the Culture of Health."

- **RWJF has a potential ongoing commitment to the census in its role of dismantling structural racism and its impacts on health.** Michelle Larkin noted the learning across strategies taking place around this “necessary role that we need to play.” This strategic endeavor has provided RWJF with “the opportunity to take a broader view of what we work on, how we work, and who we work with, around how to center equity in all three of those ways—and what are the levers that we need to push to have lasting change,” she noted. “The census contributed to that, but that change was starting to happen organically, and so it’s more of a convergence of strategic evolution and opportunity.”

**The census work had potential political implications, and RWJF’s successful involvement there helped build confidence about such projects.** “We were beginning to dip our toe into more sensitive political issues,” said Dr. Quinn. “This gave us confidence that we could assess and mitigate the associated risks and go a little further next time.”

Conversations at the Foundation about its role and its approach to politics have been prompted by a rapidly changing external environment in which bipartisanship or nonpartisanship is much harder than it was 20 or 30 years ago when that approach was developed. “You start to see us thinking differently about issues like community power and some of this democracy work and going further than we would have felt comfortable doing in the past,” Dr. Quinn observed.

- **RWJF’s contribution to the 2020 census, in concert with that of many others, led to a more accurate and complete count than likely would have been the case, given the many challenges the census faced.** “The work of the Census Subgroup was able to forestall some of the predicted worst-case scenarios and contribute to its being much better than it could have been,” in Dr. Quinn’s view.
- **The collaboration among the funders was a success story that could be a model for philanthropic partnership.** This was something of an exception since foundations do not always work well together, according to both Dr. Quinn and Ms. Larkin. “This was a really nice example of how we can come together and make a difference,” said Ms. Larkin. The census campaign may be a model for how foundations can team up on issues of mutual interest.

**Some key factors in this successful collaboration with relevance to future philanthropic partnering include:**

- > The clear Plan of Action
- > Strong leadership by Dr. Bass and Ms. Narasaki
- > Commitment of the individual funders to an accurate and complete census as fundamental to their own missions
- > A structure with multiple ways to contribute that was also sensitive to funder concerns
- > The trust fostered by the Subgroup’s inclusive culture
- > Consistent hard work by funder participants
- > Strong reaction to the politicization of the census
- > A sense of urgency
- > The opportunity to work easily with grantee organizations

- **The Census Subgroup was instrumental in advancing the visibility of the census and its connection to funders' missions and goals.** In Ms. Larkin's view, the collaborative "played a really important role in making sure that people understand the importance of participating in the census and in countering some of the misinformation."
- **The opportunity to get involved as one of a group of funders and contribute to a shared pool eased RWFJ's entrance into the census campaign.** This structure enabled the Foundation to learn and to build its commitment over time and could have applicability for future philanthropic collaboration.
- **Starting slowly and small can be a good strategy for exploring a new space.** By initially taking a limited risk, with smaller grants, momentum can be built, Dr. Quinn believes. "We were better able to understand the field, define our niche and involvement, and, ultimately, make several million dollars in grants to support this work. Sometimes there's a tendency to think we need to go big, and that can be appropriate. But in the early days, sometimes a small grant is a great way to get the ball rolling."



## VIII. Philanthropy Prepares for 2030

**T**he Census Subgroup has evolved into the Census Equity Initiative (CEI). Gary Bass is CEI chair, and he and Karen Narasaki are the staff.

By keeping the Subgroup infrastructure in place and its efforts ongoing, the Subgroup can provide input to and engage with the Census Bureau around key policy issues as they are being considered and as operational decisions are being made early in the decade. By mid-decade, when foundations and other players start paying attention, it will be too late. For example, decisions about changing the race and ethnicity questions and about whether or not to add questions related to the LGBTQ+ community will be decided in the next couple of years. An established infrastructure allows both national funders as well as local funders and stakeholders to have a voice in critical policy and operational Census Bureau decisions.

In addition to CEI's ongoing work, other groups, such as the Leadership Conference and the Brennan Center for Justice, are continuing to plan, connect, organize, and advocate to help ensure an accurate and complete count in 2030.

### THE CENSUS EQUITY INITIATIVE AGENDA

The CEI steering committee includes the same players from the Census Subgroup on both the funder and the nonprofit side, with the same fundamental goal: a fair and accurate census with a focus on historically undercounted populations. It too is guided by a three-part Plan of Action.

- **To focus on policy and operational concerns to produce a better count.** This work is “administrative advocacy, not lobbying, not legislative work,” stressed Ms. Narasaki. High priority items include:
  - **Abolishing prison gerrymandering.** Attention to this issue came at the end of the 2020 process—too late to successfully advocate for change. CEI is intent on fixing this early in the 2030 process.
  - **Getting the demographics right.** Current questions about race and ethnicity are confusing and result in data that do not accurately reflect the demographic makeup of the country. The dropdown menu for tribal affiliation may not have correct tribal names. These demographic inconsistencies and limitations have far-reaching policy implications. “If we don't get it right and the data remains like it is, we will miss an enormous understanding about what health equity means today,” said Dr. Bass.

On January 27, 2023, a notice was posted in the [Federal Register](#) requesting public comment on proposed changes to federal demographic data collection that would



include a new checkbox for “Middle Eastern or North African” and a “Hispanic or Latino” box. Also in January 2023, the Biden administration released a set of [guidelines](#) for the collection of data on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics by federal agencies.<sup>6</sup>

- **Removing language barriers.** More than 350 languages are spoken in the United States, but the census form is translated into only about a dozen based on total percentage of speakers across the country. However, in some states a significant percentage of the population may speak a language that is only a small percentage nationally (for example, Alaska natives and Navajo).
- **Reaching out to populations at risk of being undercounted.** By the end of 2023, the CEI steering committee expects to have developed an outline for 2030 Get Out the Count activities. The outline will be converted into an implementation plan in 2024, with full implementation beginning in 2025.
- **Improving the American Community Survey.** Because it is ongoing, the ACS provides current data throughout the decade between the decennial censuses. It is long and covers many domains that are not included in the census. It is the foundation of policy research, local planning, and the distribution of federal funds. In addition to its importance as a significant data source, it is a gateway for engaging in and understanding the census and for trusting the Census Bureau.  
  
But response rates are low, the sample size makes localized analysis by race and ethnicity difficult, and it is only offered in English and Spanish. “We need to focus on the ACS as well as the decennial census,” stressed Dr. Bass.
- **Ensuring adequate congressional appropriations.** In order for the Census Bureau to do its job and to have the best shot at a complete and accurate census count, the bureau’s budget must be sufficient to cover the development, administration, and analysis of a census commensurate with the size of the population and the demands of current data collection.
- **Restoring trust in the Census Bureau.** Confidence in the Census Bureau to safeguard personal data and produce a fair and accurate count had been eroded under the Trump administration.
- **To support collaborative action, especially at the state level.** While communication with state and local funders was good during the 2020 census work, Dr. Bass believes that stronger outreach is needed for 2030. Much of the success of the census campaign hinges on these funders feeling engaged, he noted, and having a sense of ownership.

Ms. Narasaki also stressed the importance of state and local organizations. With upfront financial support these organizations can be ready to convince their governors, legislators, and county officials to allocate census funding and to establish their Complete Count Committees earlier in the process. Philanthropy can help leverage government funding and support public/private partnerships.

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<sup>6</sup> Lo Wang H. “New ‘Latino’ and ‘Middle Eastern or North African’ Checkboxes Proposed for U.S. Forms.” *All Thing Considered*, NPR, January 26, 2023.

CEI is helping to continue some outreach and education at a state level, both about the results of the 2020 census and in preparation for the 2030 census. Challenges may be brought in areas with significant undercounts, and the involvement of local organizations would be advantageous. CEI is funding work in 11 states; undercounts in at least another 10 states merit attention with more resources. This work includes educating people about 2020 census products and about the ACS. Webinars about what is happening among CEI's state grantees offer ideas to those in other states.

- **Research.** This is applied research intended to help state groups doing public education and other groups engaged in policy and operational issues. Among a host of other research ideas, two examples are priorities:
  - **The use of administrative data to support the count.** To mitigate the undercount and as a cost-saving measure, the Census Bureau would like to use administrative data from programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC, initially in the ACS and perhaps later with the census.

But these records tend to be weakest on race and economic data. Research is needed to understand what such records offer, whether their use will close holes or will exacerbate the undercount, and how to address privacy worries and protect data. **RWJF has given a grant of \$300,000 to Georgetown University**, through CEI, to start research in this area.
  - **Updating the “Counting for Dollars” database.** Dr. Bass cited the pre-2020 model developed by Andrew Reamer at George Washington University that analyzed every government program and, using a formula developed for each program, shows, by state, how much money is dependent on accurate census data. State groups can use the data to explain to media and policymakers what is at stake with the census. Mr. Reamer is now a consultant to the Project on Government Oversight that is updating this research and including an analysis by county.

At this time, CEI is a \$4 million to \$5 million operation. Dr. Bass expects to raise a little more each year as the decade proceeds. In 2025 and 2026, a new plan to get ready for the decennial census can be put in place with larger fundraising goals. Currently, according to Dr. Bass from Foundation Center information, just under 3% of U.S. grantmaking is democracy-related. To him, that means that there is a very large audience among funders that could be tapped for support. “Everyone’s got to pay for making our democracy strong,” he believes. “When it gets warped, there is even more pressure on philanthropy to respond.”

Fundraising for ongoing census work has been difficult. CEI has been unable to support all of the state proposals it has received due to lack of funds. People need to believe the census is important and that they need to support work now.

## **KEEPING FUNDERS INVOLVED**

Continual education of funders is needed to reinforce that the census matters all the time, not just every 10 years. “Some of us understand the value of that, but not all,” observed Florencia Gutierrez of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which is a part of CEI. She feels that it may not be clear to others why they should continue to be involved this early in advance of the next census.

The JPB Foundation also has remained involved as part of CEI. While Angela Cheng hopes that currently involved funders will stay the course and that more funders will participate, she knows that there are many competing priorities in the democracy space. The 2024 election is likely to take up a lot of energy and money that might be directed elsewhere. Ms. Cheng expects that once it is closer to the Get Out the Count days, engagement will be heightened and increased.

One strategy used for the 2020 census to draw in new funders was direct appeals from foundation president to foundation president, not just at the program staff level. Ms. Cheng believes that since that has worked before, “it could also work again, if utilized at a strategic time.” Other funders might be drawn in if approached by the right person and educated about making a case to their board or other internal decisionmakers.

One strategy used for the 2020 census to draw in new funders was direct appeals from foundation president to foundation president, not just at the program staff level.

Ms. Gutierrez mentioned that the business community and foundations connected to large corporations, who were perhaps deterred by the politicization of the 2020 census, may be an untapped pool for the 2030 census. This community also needs to be educated now about how they should care about the census, the ACS, and population estimates, since they use these data for their business decisions.

Community foundations represent another opportunity for drawing in additional funders for 2030. Such foundations are typically donor-directed and don't have their own pool of money to distribute. But with special outreach materials, they may be able to persuade some of their donors to support census work.

## LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE LEADING STATES AND COMMUNITIES

The Leadership Conference has produced a roadmap to 2030 (*Looking To Census 2030: Findings and Recommendations from Census 2020 Partners and Funders*) with yearly milestones and reference points to ensure that communities on the ground remain aware of the census and can prepare. Interested parties of all sorts have been developing comments on the Census Bureau's plans to revise race and ethnicity questions. While Meeta Anand and her team expect to see a huge Get Out the Count campaign as the census draws near, “People recognize that the time for critical planning work and laying the foundation is now,” she said.

The fact that Ms. Anand is in her position as senior program director for census and data equity, hiring her own team, and doing census work at this point in the cycle is a signal to the field of its importance. A New York contact from Ms. Anand's time running New York Counts 2020 recently told her, “You have no idea how much it means that the Leadership Conference has someone doing this work in between censuses. That allows us to go out and say, ‘It's important, people are still doing this work at this stage in the cycle.’”

Because of RWJF's support of the Leadership Conference, there is an infrastructure that can be tapped for 2030. “Building the bench is really important; being able to hire full-time people who can help do that is critical,” stressed the Conference's Corinne Yu. “RWJF made such an important contribution to the 2020 census, and it is not too early to get involved in 2030.”

## **BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE LEADING LEGAL CHALLENGES**

In September 2022, the Brennan Center published a comprehensive set of recommendations to Congress for the 2030 census entitled *Improving the Census: Legal and Policy Reforms for a More Accurate, Equitable, and Legitimate Count*. A detailed outreach plan targeted specific members of Congress who were thought to be especially interested in the issue. In response, said Thomas Wolf in late October, “We have already gotten an unprecedented level of interest in our initial communications with the Hill, particularly among Hill Democrats.”

Mr. Wolf cited several reasons for this. The 2020 census was, in his view, “one of the most prominent areas of political interference under the Trump Administration, probably the biggest after January 6.” Also, the issue has the potential to be crosscutting ideologically and politically because, although certain groups are most likely to be undercounted, the effects of those undercounts are not limited to those groups, and undercounts hurt everyone.

While Mr. Wolf acknowledged that changes to the partisan composition of Congress in 2022 and 2024 may affect both short-term and long-term views on the census, the work of the Brennan Center is for the long term, “planting seeds 10 or 15 years ahead of time and then working to build consensus around these ideas, so [that] when the window opens to make the transition, the ideas are accepted.”

Going forward, Mr. Wolf believes that another push for a citizenship question will be one of the biggest legal challenges. The form it takes will depend on who is in the White House in the next two terms. Also significant will likely be a drive toward citizens-only apportionment for Congress or citizens-only redistricting.

Another looming issue, though maybe not a legal threat, is how to deal with the Census Bureau’s use of differential privacy, which requires data to be presented so they cannot be used to reconstruct individual people’s identities. There is a concern that the bureau’s techniques are scrambling the data in a way that renders them not useful for purposes like redistricting. While civil rights groups are very supportive of strong confidentiality, if the data interfere with political representation, then equity is affected. Mr. Wolf expects that the tradeoffs between the bureau’s confidentiality responsibilities and the technical steps—that are or aren’t consonant with equity—will be a subject of attention in the coming years.

Mr. Wolf’s sense is that it is unlikely that the census will generate less controversy over time; rather, views about it are likely to become even more contentious. As a result, he said, “The threats of manipulation or wrongdoing that could damage the quality of the data will only go up, which then only further endangers the kind of fundamental equities that people have with quality data.” Thus, the need for support for legal responses to these ongoing challenges will continue.



## IX. RWJF Looks Ahead

### AN ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE 2030 CENSUS

**R**WJF currently supports the Census Equity Initiative with a grant of \$400,000 from mid-September 2021 through mid-September 2023, and continues as a member, with Carolyn Miller as its representative. Brian Quinn expects that RWJF will provide a similar level of support over the next several years, and then potentially ramp up funding as it gets closer to the 2030 census.

“We and many other funders got involved pretty late last time. Laying some of the groundwork now may make it easier to make the case for a more robust census effort in 2030,” said Dr. Quinn. “I would envision RWJF being supportive of that, given the success from an outcome perspective and also of the internal success of our engagement this time around.” Ms. Narasaki stressed the importance of RWJF’s continuing participation: “For RWJF, it’s important to be involved sooner, in order to have a voice,” she said.

### TAKING ON REDISTRICTING

Gary Bass co-chairs a separate funder collaborative on redistricting, [Fair Representation in Redistricting](#). While RWJF initially viewed redistricting as too political for its support, it now sits on the redistricting collaborative and is one of its larger funders. Senior Policy Officer Giridhar Mallya, MD, is the RWJF representative.

Even before the census, Policy department staff had been thinking about redistricting work and made connections with redistricting field leaders and funders. At the same time, the conversation about the census was happening mainly in REL. “It’s only more recently that we started to connect those threads,” Dr. Mallya explained.

Michelle Larkin described redistricting as “the perfect example of structural racism that has very significant and lasting impact on communities that have been historically underinvested in and marginalized.” RWJF’s approach in this area, she said, includes working “to understand the implications of redistricting and why, in the way it is happening, it is not equitable and does not create the opportunities for health and wellbeing that we should have as a country.”

Policy staff is working on longer-term goals around redistricting. **A \$2 million grant to support Fair Representation in Redistricting (through the New Venture Fund) has been renewed at \$1 million** for another year through October 2024. These grants support community engagement in the redistricting process; the continued use of “total population” counts for congressional apportionment and redistricting; technical services for drawing equitable

redistricting maps; and nonpartisan litigation strategies related to redistricting. **RWJF has also contributed \$250,000 to a pooled fund set up by the Fund for New Jersey** at the Princeton Area Community Foundation to support fair redistricting in New Jersey, as well as **\$15,000 to the Fund for New Jersey** for legal technical assistance in support of fair redistricting.

As with its involvement with the Census Subgroup and now the Census Equity Initiative, working on Fair Representation in Redistricting has afforded RWJF the opportunity to have a bigger impact by combining its funding with that of others (in New Jersey as well) and to learn from the experts brought together by the initiative.

### **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BEYOND THE CENSUS**

Since 2019 and 2020, RWJF's Policy department has funded several categories of work in the democracy space, according to Dr. Mallya. One includes redistricting at the national and New Jersey state levels, as described above. The second is "civic representation," work on ballot measures as a way to advance equity-promoting policies. A third category centers on making government more effective and equitable. Staff is especially addressing how work in one category is related to that in another. "We see the link between democracy and health as really important to our health equity vision and that there are funding, leadership, and narrative roles for us to play," Dr. Mallya noted. Much of this vision of health equity requires both good policy and good governing.

In thinking about civic engagement and democracy-related work more generally, debate continues at RWJF about "whether or not and how far we go in working on democracy,"

Ms. Larkin said. "We're learning as we go to understand where it makes sense for us to lean

in, given that our central purpose is around health and dismantling the structural barriers to health." The Policy department is looking at whether "that should be a Foundation-wide policy priority for us," she stated, "but prioritizing one initiative means that something else will take a lower priority."

RWJF currently supports work around civic engagement... but there is not a shared perspective on the democracy question at this point.

Answering this broader question will allow the Foundation to take a look at more specific areas of civic engagement. RWJF currently supports work around civic engagement, such as elevating, advancing, and

shifting power in communities and participatory budgeting at the community level. But there is not a shared perspective on the democracy question at this point, Ms. Larkin emphasized.

Looking to the future through his policy lens, Dr. Mallya noted RWJF's shift toward developing generational goals over 20 to 30 years. "There's a collective sense that we can't accomplish the policy goals we see as most important for the health of the nation without a fair and functional democracy," he said. "There is interest in being and staying engaged in the long term. Now we need to figure out the specifics and what our most valuable and feasible role might be." (For more on the connection between civic engagement and health, see [Examining Civic Engagement Links to Health](#), an RWJF-funded report by Rand Corporation.)

## THE CENSUS AS FOUNDATIONAL TO A CULTURE OF HEALTH

RWJF's measured entry into the census campaign allowed it to develop a clear understanding of the census as the bedrock of the data that are critical to the research it funds; to the resourcing of health and social programs that beneficiaries of its grantees depend upon; and to the underpinnings of the functioning democracy so necessary to achieving true health equity. In short, the census is truly foundational to the Culture of Health that is RWJF's vision. Once wholeheartedly onboard, RWJF's contributions—as funder, influencer, connector, and fount of knowledge and experience in health and healthcare—were a vital part of the 2020 census campaign.

As the Brennan Center's Thomas Wolf noted, the 2030 census is likely to be even more controversial than that in 2020. Questions of identity, of who should be counted, and of how that count should be employed in the structure of our democracy are more fraught than ever. The importance of an accurate and complete census count to the realization of RWJF's commitment “to work together to create opportunities that improve health equity for everyone,” cannot be understated. The Foundation's continued investment in the census infrastructure and involvement in the ongoing effort to prepare for the next census are viewed as highly valuable to those immersed in this work. Including the RWJF voice in the broader conversation about the 2030 census will benefit the development and operation of the census itself and will expand the Foundation's knowledge base and further its consideration of its role in civic engagement writ large.

The 2020 census campaign was complex and multilayered. For those who worked so hard, it was also exciting and rewarding. It was arduous, but the effort paid off, despite many serious challenges. The 2030 census will present its own set of demands, but the support infrastructure is now there and the process tested. The rewards for hard work over the coming decade can be that much greater.

The 2020 census campaign was complex and multilayered. For those who worked so hard, it was also exciting and rewarding.





# Appendices

## **APPENDIX A: KEY CENSUS CAMPAIGN PARTICIPANTS, INITIATIVES, AND TERMS**

The 2020 census campaign was a highly complex endeavor. To aid the reader, the following list describes the key campaign participants, initiatives, and terms mentioned in this report:

**American Community Survey (ACS):** an annual U.S. Census Bureau survey with over 3.5 million households contacted to participate

**Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC:** See [Census Counts](#) below.

**Census Campaign** (or **Campaign**): terms used in this report and other places to describe the total effort around philanthropy's support of the 2020 census

**Census Counts:** group engaged in the Get Out the Count component of the census work, led by three advocacy organizations: the Leadership Conference Education Fund, [NALEO Educational Fund](#), and [Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC](#)

**Census Equity Initiative:** became the name of the Census Subgroup after the 2020 census

**Census Infrastructure:** all of the component parts of the census campaign

**Census Quality Reinforcement Taskforce:** A network of about 250 civil rights organizers, attorneys, and more housed at the National Conference on Citizenship

**Census Subgroup:** a subset of the Democracy Funders Collaborative that came together in 2015 to work toward an accurate and complete census count

**Democracy Funders Collaborative:** an informal group of philanthropies supporting democracy initiatives

**Fair Representation on Redistricting:** separate funder collaborative on redistricting

**Funders' Committee for Civic Participation:** an organization serving philanthropies committed to equity in the democratic process. The **Funders Census Initiative** is a working group of the Funders' Committee dedicated to the census.

**Get Out the Count:** the component of the census campaign focused on the efforts of nonprofit organizations to increase participation in the census

**Hill Strategy Group:** an advocacy group that included the Leadership Conference Census Task Force; the National Urban League; the National Congress of American Indians; the SEIU labor union; the ACLU; and others

**Leadership Conference Education Fund:** See [Census Counts](#) above.

**Legal Strategy Taskforce:** The Leadership Conference created and led this with the Brennan Center to coordinate efforts among litigation groups to safeguard the census

**NALEO Educational Fund:** See [Census Counts](#) above.

**New Jersey Counts:** the state's census initiative

**New Venture Fund:** a Washington-based fiscal sponsor that managed the Subgroup's pooled fund

**State Counts Action Network (SCAN):** the mechanism that ensured that local, state, and national nonprofit groups were aligned in purpose and consistent messaging. Currently remains in operation, with about 200 separate organizations in 46 states engaged in ongoing census work.

**United Philanthropy Forum:** a network of over 90 philanthropy-serving organizations

## APPENDIX B: RESOURCES

Multiple reports on the history and work of the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup and others involved in the 2020 census campaign have been produced and are readily available. These rich resources have informed the development of this document. These include:

### BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

- [Ensuring Adequate Policies and Resources for the 2020 Census](#)—an overview of the organization and work of the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup with its Plan of Action.

### EVALUATION

- [Examining Civic Engagement Links to Health](#), an RWJF-funded report by Rand Corporation
- [Philanthropy and the 2020 Census](#), a comprehensive assessment, commissioned by the Census Subgroup and prepared by consultant William H. Woodwell Jr., on the work of the Subgroup, with history, headline results, statistics, key takeaways, lessons, responses to the impact of COVID-19, and other analyses.
- [Together We Count: Assessing Efforts to Support a Fair and Accurate 2020 Census](#), another appraisal, also commissioned by the Census Subgroup and prepared by ORS Impact and Barsoum Policy Consulting, on the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the national funders' work toward the 2020 census.
- [How Civil Society Saved the 2020 Census](#)—Fall 2022 article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* by Arturo Vargas, Gary Bass, and Karen Narasaki that describes philanthropy's role in support of the 2020 census and details key lessons.

- [Census Appropriations Advocacy: A Surgical Strategy](#)—a case study, developed by Barsoum Policy Consulting, on advocacy to increase federal funding for the Census Bureau and the 2020 census.
- [The Fight Against the Citizenship Question: Ensuring Everyone Counts in the 2020 Census](#)—a case study, developed by Barsoum Policy Consulting, on the litigation and advocacy against the inclusion of a question about citizenship in the 2020 census.
- [Reflections on the 2020 Census National Hub Reports Project](#)—documentation, prepared by ORS Impact, on each national hub organization’s approach to its 2020 census work.
- [Together We Count: Assessing Efforts to Support a Fair and Accurate 2020 Census](#)—an assessment on PowerPoint, prepared by ORS Impact and Barsoum Policy Consulting, on the main elements of the collaborative work to support the 2020 census.
- [Texting Campaigns Analyses](#)—two reports and a slide deck, developed by Smart As A Fox, on a pilot project and larger campaign to increase peer-to-peer texting outreach and capacity-building to reach hard-to-count populations during the 2020 census.
- [Lessons from the Census Counts Campaign](#)—an assessment, prepared by ORS Impact and Barsoum Policy Consulting on the Census Counts Campaign developed by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, including goals, census infrastructure, evaluation of strategies, and implications for the 2030 census and other policy issues. (Not available online. Contact [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights for access.](#))
- [2020 Census Counts Campaign: Lessons from the Field](#)—case studies, prepared by ORS Impact and Barsoum Policy Consulting on six states’ experience with the 2020 Census Counts Campaign. (Not available online. Contact [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) for access.)
- [Every Moment Counts: New Jersey’s Blueprint to Census Success in 2020 and Beyond](#)—a report on New Jersey’s 2020 census campaign commissioned by Advocates for Children of New Jersey and prepared by Peter Chen, coordinator for the Census 2020 NJ Coalition.
- [Every Moment Counts: New Jersey’s Blueprint to Census Success in 2020 and Beyond](#)—executive summary of the *Every Moment Counts* report.
- [Census 2020 page](#)—a series of fact sheets and briefs on the importance of the census to different constituencies by the Georgetown Center’s Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- [Philanthropy’s Success with Census Needs to Continue](#)—reflections by Gary Bass and Angela Cheng on the accomplishments of the Census Subgroup, plans to maintain the effort in advance of the 2030 census, and lessons with applicability to other joint philanthropic collaborations.
- [Looking To Census 2030: Findings and Recommendations from Census 2020 Partners and Funders](#)—a comprehensive set of findings, developed by consultants Karen Narasaki and Tim Lim, related to the 2020 census performance, along with recommendations to the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Congress, and the Administration related to the next census.

- [Improving the Census: Legal and Policy Reforms for a More Accurate, Equitable, and Legitimate Count](#)—a set of 19 proposals by the Brennan Center for Justice for Congressional actions to reform the census. This includes a detailed report and a fact sheet that summarizes the proposals.
- [A Blueprint for Philanthropic Census Engagement](#)—Census Bureau milestones and ways for funders to engage and invest in the decade before the 2030 census, from the Funders Census Initiative.
- [Fair Representation in Redistricting](#)—a separate funder collaborative on redistricting, co-chaired by Gary Bass

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWEES

### INSIDE RWJF

**Michelle Larkin, JD, MS, RN**, vice president, Program Management

**Giridhar Mallya, MD**, senior policy officer

**Carolyn Miller, MA, MS**, senior program officer, Research-Evaluation-Learning

**Brian Quinn, PhD**, associate vice president, Research-Evaluation-Learning

**Brent Thompson, MPA**, senior communications officer

### OUTSIDE RWJF

**Meeta Anand, JD**, senior director, Census and Data Equity, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

**Gary Bass, PhD**, executive director emeritus, Bauman Foundation, and Chair, Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup (now Census Equity Initiative)

**Angela Cheng, MPA**, senior program officer, The JPB Foundation, and Chair, Evaluation Subcommittee of the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup (now Census Equity Initiative)

**Florencia Gutierrez, MPA, MEd**, senior associate, Annie Casey Foundation

**Kiki Jamieson, PhD**, president, The Fund for New Jersey

**Karen Narasaki, JD**, consultant to the Bauman Foundation and to the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup

**Thomas Wolf, JD**, deputy director, Democracy, Brennan Center for Justice

**Corrine Yu, JD**, senior advisor to the President, interim executive vice president of Campaigns and Programs, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights