



Soliciting Input or Suggestions on 2030 Census Preliminary Research

November 14, 2022

Jennifer Reichert, Chief, Decennial Census Management Division
Census Bureau, Department of Commerce
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RE: Partners for Rural Transformation comments to Document # 2022-17647; Re87 FR 50599.
Request for Comment: Soliciting Input or Suggestions on 2030 Census Preliminary Research

Dear Ms. Reichert;

Guided by a vision of a nation where persistent poverty no longer exists, six regional Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) located in and serving regions with a high prevalence of rural persistent poverty came together. The CDFIs—Come Dream | Come Build (cdc|b) of Brownsville, Communities Unlimited, Fahe, First Nations Oweesta Corporation, HOPE Credit Union and Enterprise Corporation, and Rural Community Assistance Corporation—formed a coalition, currently called the [Partners for Rural Transformation](#) (PRT). With a shared ethos of investing in both people and places and informed by the voices of local people, we seek to unify around opportunities in diverse communities at a time of great division in our nation. A closer look at persistent poverty America reveals how structural exclusion by place and race continues to paint a picture that is steadfastly rural and marred by racial, capital and data inequity. These challenges are exacerbated by a history of disinvestment, data and resource extraction.

Rural America faces systematic, avoidable, and unjust economic, health, and racial disparities. Legacies of forced geographic and cultural displacement, enslavement, financial discrimination, residential segregation, and transitioning economies have left an indelible mark. Despite evidence of persisting rural inequities, there is no coordinated and comprehensive effort to repair the rapport between communities and large-scale databases to support deep systems change – that is, to generate research that informs the shifts in policies, practices, resources, power, trust, and attitudes necessary to advance equity. Census data impacts individuals directly, especially if they receive benefits¹. Unfortunately, with lower rural and Native participation in the Census, gaps in data are perpetuated; leading to funding decisions to be established off minimal evidence. Therefore, Partners for Rural Transformation suggest the following steps to achieve increased participation from Native, rural, and majority-minority and persistently poor communities for the 2030 Census:

- PRT urges the Census Bureau to identify and work in collaboration and tandem with trusted community leaders on educating their community about the 2030 Census. Having a government official or a stranger approach a community with pre-existing concerns or reservations will only perpetuate myths and fears of the Census. Educating and giving

¹ William O'Hare, [2020 Census Faces Challenges in Rural America](#), University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy, December 2017

resources to known and trusted community leaders will allow the local leaders to disseminate information, leading the community to better receive the education from a more known and trusted source.

- Increased funding for on-the-ground resources for community partners to support earlier and long-term outreach is necessary. Funding to hire permanent Census navigators, outreach leaders and other staff for local or state offices is critical. Having a Census staff in each county or state would allow someone to take the time to identify the needs of a community, build rapport and connections, dispel myths and deploy Census-related resources when it is time for data collection. This would start to build the participation slowly, but surely instead of one big push close to the Census collection and no more work until the next decade. For increased participation, time, energy, knowledge, passion and trust are going to have to be given in order to raise participation.
- Develop and Capitalizing Existing Community Trust. The importance of trust is essential to data collection. Hiring locally and having local messengers as avenues to enhance trust and combat myths is pivotal to increasing participation. States, counties and or local community organizations should have the responsibility of identifying the right messengers.
- Incentives. When considering the historical context of these communities, there is a repetitive cycle of theft of resources and disinvestment. Their data is valuable, so is their time. Their stories and information are assets, of which are the last assets a community may have. The Census Bureau cannot mine the last of a community's assets (their stories) and expect folks to not benefit in some way from it in the short-term. There is already a lack of investment and trust that their participation filling out the Census impacts them and their community, which it does, but, without that trust it is just another extraction of unpaid labor.
- Thoughtful Hard To Count (HTC) Strategies. With many of these communities being more mobile in nature, it is critical to establish multiple points of contact to community members. This can include text, calls, mail, commercials, and in-person contacts. There needs to be an established, coordinated strategy in order to not burden or intimidate people. If one person were to get 6-8 calls a day regarding the Census, that would not encourage them to fill it out. There needs to be a balance between outreach and understanding in order to best implement outreach.
- Building Energy Around Census. In lots of smaller communities, there are typically 1-2 celebrities, events or that town's specific "claim to fame" that is highly regarded by the community. Capitalizing what unites and excites a rural, Native, Indigenous and persistently poor community will help rally a community around participating in the Census.
- Inclusivity. In order to increase participation from groups with heightened levels of distrust or fear, marketing and inclusivity can potentially alleviate these barriers. Having adequate translators to help families translate the Census or their answers, as well as having correct and up-to-date translations of the Census and answers available where translators are not able to be staffed should be mandated. Marketing will also be a key player in inclusivity. The Census' marketing needs to start early and stay consistent year-round, every year. It needs to promote privacy and security for families to respond accurately and feel safe to do so without fear of deportation, loss of benefits or persecution.

Rural America is much more than the sum of its deficiencies. These communities possess unique strengths and potential—in human and natural capital, in social and physical infrastructure, and

cultural resources. To affect change and increase equity requires evidence-based policymaking to invest in these strengths, center rural voices, and focus on solutions, not only problems. The moment is now. With rural issues gaining attention as part of the national equity agenda and historic and bipartisan federal investments in rural communities through the American Rescue Plan Act, Inflation Reduction Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, many are seeking new data and evidence-based strategies to advance equity and strengthen investments to create thriving and equitable rural futures.

Sincerely,



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