



THE NEED FOR AN ACCURATE 2020 COUNT IN VIRGINIA

Often seen as a cornerstone government program, the decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS) both play a pivotal role in collecting and reporting data that is essential for the government, business, and nonprofits to function. This data is used to make decisions that impact every community across the country on issues including **redistricting**, the enforcement of **civil rights laws**, **education**, and **infrastructure funding**, among others.

Despite gains in recent iterations, the census has traditionally struggled to get a complete count of low-income communities, particularly those with a high population of communities of color. Ensuring they are properly counted in the 2020 Census is the first step to ensuring that these voters are represented in the redistricting process and policy debate moving forward.

CHANGES TO CONGRESSIONAL APPORTIONMENT

A main function of census data is to reapportion Congressional seats in states and draw legislative boundary lines. Congressional seats are determined based upon the count of people living in districts. If the Census Bureau does not receive adequate funding, which is likely, there is a strong chance for a significant population undercount. This could result in Congressional seats being lost or remaining unchanged despite population growth. **New analysis from Election Data Services show that Virginia will not gain or lose a seat after the 2020 Census count.**

FEDERAL FUNDING ALLOCATED IN STATE

In 2015, Virginia received \$10,182,105,724 for the 16 largest Census-guided programs. These programs include **Medicaid, Highway Planning and Construction, Special Education Grants, School Lunch Programs, Head Start/Early Head Start, Health Center Programs, Low Income Home Energy Assistance, Foster Care, and CHIP**. If people are missed on the census then these programs will suffer from lack of funding in the undercounted state.

FINDING 'HARD-TO-COUNT' AREAS

Hard-to-count populations (HTC) are generally less likely to voluntarily respond to the Census questionnaire. These populations include: racial minorities, young children, lower income persons, people who do not speak English fluently, undocumented immigrants, homeless persons, and those with severe distrust of the government. In 2020, the majority of Census responses will be gathered online. This means that rural areas that lack broadband service may now be considered a HTC population. Many of the hard-to-count populations are in communities that utilize the census-guided programs at higher rates. According to the CUNY Mapping Services at the Center for Urban Research, **Lee County, Radford City, Kent County, Southampton County, Rappahannock County, Harrisonburg city, Warren County, Culpeper County, and the entire urban crescent are considered to be HTC areas.**

VIRGINIA CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TABLE'S ROLE IN REACHING UNDERCOUNTED POPULATIONS

Our organization, Virginia Civic Engagement Table (VCET), has relationships with many of the communities and organizations serving within HTC areas. We are a table composed of 40 community organizations across the state working on a wide variety of issues that impact working Virginians. Our VCET partners have spent the last decade building trust within these HTC communities. Over the years our partners have engaged in non-partisan civic engagement, such as voter registration drives and educating Virginians about the issues that impact their lives. Because VCET and our partners work in HTC communities, we are seen as respected trusted messengers.

Our partners have identified that an accurate 2020 Census count is vitally important for the communities we work in. We plan to educate our communities about the importance of the census and will be able to answer questions that people may have.

VIRGINIA'S ROLE IN THE 2020 CENSUS

The Census Bureau has been underfunded for the 2020 cycle, which has caused a delay in planning and staffing operations. Experts recommend that the 2020 Census operations require \$194 million in addition to the \$1.654 billion currently requested for fiscal year 2018. To help close the funding gap, the Census Bureau has opted to use internet response options over traditional canvasser outreach. Although this may be an initial cost-saving measure, it puts hard-to-count communities, rural populations, and areas with no access to broadband at risk of not being counted.

Full funding at the state level can help ensure an accurate count and in turn prevent Virginia from missing out on federal dollars for important programs. Since the Census has never experienced a severe funding shortage comparable to 2020, many states have not typically funded Census outreach programs at scale. However, several states have started to explore the option of funding at the state and county levels. As an example, California has funded state census outreach operations since the 2000 Census and found that in counties which received grants in 2000, the mail return rate of census forms was 6% higher than counties that did not participate. These results show success despite funding coming just five months before the 2000 count. At the time, California Counts staff reported that the campaign could have had a bigger impact with earlier funding.

Virginia needs to prepare now to ensure an accurate count in the 2020 Census. We are requesting the State of Virginia include \$3 million for census preparation and outreach for FY 2019. With this funding Virginia will be able to establish a Complete Count Committee composed of members from business and public sectors along with community-based organizations. Providing this funding ahead of 2020 is critical and will allow for statewide communications, technical support, and the establishment of questionnaire assistance centers within the Urban Crescent. With these tools it is likely that the response rate in Virginia will increase from the 2010 rates.