

Why an Accurate Census Matters

Every 10 years, the United States Census Bureau carries out a count, or Census, of the nation's residents. The Census is supposed to count everyone living in the United States. The data collected is fundamental for decisions that impact every community across our state for the next 10 years, such as redistricting, the enforcement of civil rights laws, education, infrastructure funding, and more.

Working toward an accurate Census that uplifts historically undercounted populations in Washington State and addresses the barriers that limit their participation is crucial. **Essential resources and representation are at stake in an undercounted Census.**

Resources

There is a high risk of **losing critical resources** for Washington communities and service providers with an undercounted Census. Hundreds of federal financial assistance programs rely on data from the Census to guide the funding to states, counties, cities, and households.

In 2015, Washington received about \$14 billion, about \$2,000 per person, for the 16 largest Census-guided programs, which 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, Children's Health Insurance Program

Representation

A main function of Census data is to reapportion states for both Congressional and Legislative seats so that new boundary lines for voting districts can be drawn. For example, based on 2010 Census data, Washington State's population grew 14.1% from 2000. With that growth, Washington earned a 10th seat in Congress.

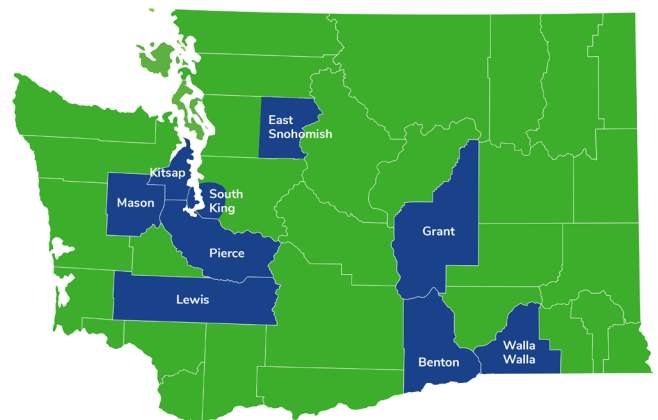
Voting districts are determined by the total number of people living in the area, not just the number of voters or citizens. The boundary drawing process, called redistricting, determines the political representation of all communities.

Making sure that all people in all communities are counted in the 2020 Census could dramatically change the ways in which the districts are drawn. The re-districting process can keep communities together or split them apart. It can also change who wins an election—and ultimately which party controls Congress or the Legislature.

Traditionally Undercounted Communities

The Census has traditionally undercounted certain communities. Called Hard to Count Communities by the Census Bureau, these are defined as communities and areas where completed surveys were returned via mail at much lower rates.

Traditionally undercounted communities include racial minorities, young children, lower income persons, people who do not speak English fluently, undocumented immigrants, Native Americans, LGBTQ individuals, homeless persons, and those with severe distrust of the government. These are the very communities that are in need of equal representation in our government, and if they are not counted accurately in the Census, they are at risk of being further disenfranchised from our government and services.



In Washington, these areas include King, Grant, Walla Walla, Benton, Lewis, Mason, Pierce, Kitsap, and East Snohomish counties. In King County these include White Center, Burien, Tukwila, SeaTac, Renton, Kent, Auburn, Des Moines, and Federal Way.

Greater risk for larger undercount in 2020.

Insufficient Funding for Field Operations

The Census Bureau has been underfunded for the 2020 cycle, causing a delay in planning and staffing operations. Census operations require an additional \$194 million. This underfunding has already resulted in two canceled tests in Washington State and scaled back operations that affect outreach strategies for traditionally undercounted communities. Less staff and poor planning could lead to a less accurate count.

The Citizenship Question

For the first time in 70 years, the Census is planning to include a question to every household asking if you are a U.S. citizen. This question creates enormous fear and

distrust for native- and foreign-born households, both citizen and non-citizen, about the confidentiality of their personal information and how government authorities may use that information. This leaves a huge task for community leaders and allies to organize around removing the question and/or preparing to alleviate response barriers if the question becomes official.

The Digital Divide

To help reduce the overall cost, the Census Bureau has opted to use internet response as the primary response tool. This initial cost-savings puts traditionally undercounted communities and rural populations without broadband access at greater risk of not being counted.

Census 2020 Timeline

March 2020		April 2020	
Census postcards are sent to most homes.		April 1 - Census Day	
Mailing 1: Letter with info to take survey online (the majority of people will get this) or Letter + Paper Survey (20-25% of people based on demographic characteristics and internet connectivity of a geographic area).		Mailing 4: Letter + Questionnaire to non-respondents.	
Mailing 2: Letter to non-respondents.		Mailing 5: "It's not too late" postcard to non-respondents.	
Mailing 3: Postcard to non-respondents.			
May - July 2020	December 31, 2020	March 2021	
Conduct non-response follow-up: census workers visit addresses from the Census Master Address file that did not complete a Census questionnaire and collect information at the door.	The Census Director delivers population counts to the President and the clerk of the House of Representatives.	The Census Bureau completes delivery of redistricting counts to the states.	



Win/Win supports a network of progressive organizations coming together to advance racial, social, and economic equity across Washington through civic and political engagement. For more information and to sign up for updates, contact Elsa Batres-Boni at 206-436-0289 or ebastresboni@winwinaction.org. También puede contactar a Elsa en español.