



September 6, 2019

TO: Robert Mujica, Budget Director / New York State Department of Finance

FR: Patricia Swann, on behalf of the New York State Census Equity Fund

Last spring, the New York State legislature approved an allocation of “up to” \$20 million for census outreach. Though modest, these funds are essential. New York State has many census challenges: large percentages of immigrants and mixed-status households, migrant workers, and refugees; young children; people of color; and rural areas that are isolated and lack internet access.

Six months later, there has been no communication to the public about a strategy or timetable for distribution of these funds. As we approach the last quarter of the year, the window for making effective use of this money is quickly closing. We urge you in your role as the state’s budget director to consider these factors as you weigh options for disbursing critically-needed census funds:

- Together with local institutions like schools and libraries, community organizations and nonprofit entities that deliver and/or connect people to health, education, and other vital services are often the best way to get the word out about the importance of the census. Through their direct contacts with hundreds of New Yorkers on a daily basis, they can amplify the messages people will hear through paid advertising and media campaigns.
- Use of census funds will be most important during the critical self-response phase, scheduled to start in a few short months. In order to plan for census outreach activities during that phase, responsible nonprofit organizations need to know now what funding will be available from the state, and what they must do to access those funds. All options available to fast-track disbursement of census funds once contracts are approved should be explored.
- Nonprofit organizations that work in hard-to-count communities are the best ‘trusted messengers’—people in these communities know the staff, and often speak the same language. Some of these organizations may already be recipients of State funds, and familiar with State agency contracting and drawdown procedures. But many are not. This could be an obstacle to putting the State’s

census dollars to work quickly and efficiently, especially for small grassroots organizations. The good news is that New York State has an extensive network of community foundations and local United Ways with the capacity to disburse large numbers of small grants to these types of organizations, *while maintaining measures to ensure accountability*. We urge you to consider partnering with these entities in disbursing census funds.

In conclusion, we urge you to join with nonprofit organizations, local institutions, foundations, and large segments of the business community in providing financial and non-financial resources to support a fair and accurate count for the State of New York. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to talk about any aspect of NYSCEF's work, or are considering directing funds to Census 2020 efforts, please contact me. I'd love to tell you more about our plans.

Sincerely,
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