

Census in a time of COVID-19

With COVID-19 reaching pandemic-status, New York State has banned all non-essential gatherings of any kind. This means that many of our field plans to get out the count need to be rethought. We recognize this is a scary and frustrating time for census advocates. But by finding ways to engage, and by continuing to fight for New York's fair share of resources and representation, we can come through this more resilient and hopeful for a better future.

Below we offer suggestions of outreach strategies and tactics that can be deployed in this time. Also, remember to check the Census Bureau website regularly to see if they have made any operational adjustments in light of COVID-19. The guidance as of 3/25 can be found [here](#).

Remember that the Census Bureau has three ways for households to complete the 2020 Census: by phone, by internet, or by paper. All outreach should encourage people to take advantage of these multiple response methods.

What can Community Based Organizations (CBOs) do?

Engage your people in the digital space

- **Think about using Twitter or Facebook to create paid ads.** Both platforms require ad verification before posting GOTC-related ads, as further described [here](#).
- **Identify influencers in your network** to uplift social media census messages. Ask these influences to post a video or selfie on why the census matters to them and share information on how their followers can complete the census.
 - Provide influencers with a [sample script](#), [talking points](#), and answers to [tough questions](#) on the importance of the census. Perhaps pull together a virtual training for your influencers on messaging and the census, take a look at this [presentation](#) from Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM).
 - Who is an influencer?

- **Continue to share census messages online!** Additionally, retweet or share posts from partners in this work and ask your allies to share your messages.
 - Unsure where to start? United We Dream has shareable graphics and posts [here](#) and Fair Immigration Reform Movement has sample posts [here](#). Further, find an example content calendar from FIRM [here](#).
 - New York Count has developed a social media strategy for the Census for NY which you can access [here](#)!
 - Communicate beforehand with your partners as to what and when you'll be tweeting. Don't forget to recruit your social-media influencers.
 - Additionally, the Census Bureau has several recorded PSAs available for organizations to use or modify. Learn more about these PSAs [here](#).
- **Get creative!** Engage those folks who may be bored at home with a creative initiative. Begin a social media challenge like [#CensusMemeChallenge](#), art contest, selfie contest, or TikTok challenge encouraging people to share "why the census matters to me." Have census swag? Repurpose your event swag to be an incentive for the winners of this contest.
 - Do we want to say anything about SoapBox?
- **Encourage your communities to get involved in already existing Census social media campaigns:**
 - Black Census Week
 - Census Day
 - Immigrants Count for the Census
 - NY Counts 2020 often alerts people to existing social media campaigns.
- **Check out CensusU!** There are many digital organizing trainings with national experts on the Census Counts website. These trainings include setting up social media campaigns, SMS programs, creative content, and digital advertising. All training is an hour in length and includes shareable information. Check out the full training suite [here](#).
- **Get competitive juices flowing for your community.** Have your website updated daily for self-response numbers for your community -- be it Census tract, county or city. Compare these numbers to the national rate or the 2010 rate! Or even the NYS rate!

- **Get competitive juices flowing for your organization.** Have everyone in your organization report in when they've filled out the Census, and try to hit a 100% rate internally!
- **Use your email and facebook to promote taking the Census.** Here is a [facebook frame](#) to show you have proudly been counted in the Census. This link also takes you to an [email footer](#) you can add to your work and personal emails!
- **FREE INTERNET.** As we are aware, the digital space is not a way to reach everyone, especially in areas with low internet accessibility. However, for the time being there resources to help bridge the digital-divide.
 - Almost 200 service providers nationwide (including AT&T, Cox Communications, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon) have signed onto the Federal Communications Commission's [Keep Americans Connected Pledge](#). *The pledge states that for the next 60 days, the company will:*
 - not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic;
 - waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and
 - open its Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them.
 - In addition, several providers are *removing data limits as well as expanding services for low-income households*. AT&T, Comcast, and T-Mobile, have all removed data caps for the time being. Expansion of services includes:
 - Comcast internet essentials is free for 60 days
 - HH with students - 60 days free of Spectrum or Altice
 - Connect2Compete - expand and improve service
 - *Note, that Comcast's Xfinity hotspots are available in some locations to fill out your census questionnaire for free. Find a hotspot here:*
<https://hotspots.wifi.xfinity.com/>

Relational Organizing Tactics Remotely

- **Use digital tools.** Hustle, GetThru, or Action Network digital pledge cards. SMS messages can include direct links to the [census webpage](#).
 - ***For Hustle and ThruText:*** Host “Text from Home” Virtual Parties where all texters use the system at the same time from their own homes and communicate via Slack or an instant messaging system that allows them to connect with each other. Text important information about participating in the census, along with links to web pages with more information and your census pledge cards
 - Work with your local county or city officials to have a “Text Out the Count” day -- or weekend -- for your area to create more buzz and interest.
 - ***Digital Pledge Cards:*** Create digital pledge cards on Action Network and use social media, your website, text messages and emails to spread your pledge card link and get more pledges
 - ***Consider short-code SMS vendors.***
- **Host a virtual phone-banking party.** Gather your volunteers and host a phone banking party from the comfort of your own homes. Callers can use the below systems at the same time and communicate via Slack or other instant messaging systems to share their calling stories and ask questions they encounter. All phone scripts (such as this [script from Montana](#)) should include information about how households can respond to the 2020 census. Here are a few tools to utilizing for phone banking:
 - ***Virtual Phone Banks:*** load phone lists into VAN’s VPB tool and have volunteers or staff make hand dial calls and enter the data into the system as they make the calls
 - ***VAN’s Predictive Dialer:*** load landline phone lists into this tool where callers can be automatically connected to landline phones and enter the data into the system as they make the calls
 - ***ThruTalk:*** load cell phone lists into this tool where callers can be automatically connected to cell phones and enter the data into the system as they make the calls.
- **Consider hosting remote census “office hours.”** Communicate with your people on how they can continue to reach you in this time of uncertainty.

Dedicate a time, a phone line (or google hang-out), or set up a [Calendly](#) for people to set up a time to ask you questions as they complete their census. Staff these lines with language capabilities to the extent possible.

- **Create a campaign urging anyone in your network to email/text/call/message their family and friends and colleagues about the census.** Ask your volunteers (and your followers on social media!) to text/call their family and friends to complete the census. Provide volunteers with [sample talking points](#) and social media posts to help spread the word!
 - **Need to stock up on cell phones or tablets?** Check out this [helpful guide](#) for the best value for prepaid or low-cost plans.
 - **Reach** is a \$10 app that can allow you to text your contacts in a more personalized manner.
 - **Have friends that work at large institutions?** Have them email their colleagues urging them to fill out the Census.
 - **Activate any community you may be a part of!** Your book club, your facebook mom group, your buddies from an old campaign!
- **Host a Virtual Training** for volunteers, staff, friends, family and neighbors on how to be a census ambassador -- remember anyone can engage in a conversation online, on the phone or in person (6 feet away) about the Census.
 - Digital trainings might require more staff members than in-person training to ensure technology runs smoothly. Ensure you have at least one staff-member dedicated to troubleshoot any tech problems as they arise. When utilizing the breakout rooms consider dedicating one staff member per breakout room to facilitate discussion in the digital space, which might flow more awkwardly than in-person.
 - Need help learning how to use Zoom and other digital meeting space platforms? Check out this guide [here](#).
 - Did you know some tech companies are offering their online meeting platforms for FREE for the next few months? Find more information on how to access these free resources [here](#).
 - **Further**, Zoom hosts regular live trainings and several recorded trainings to teach you how to [get started using Zoom](#) (see how to use breakout

rooms [here](#)). Google Hangouts is an additional tool you can use for up to 25 people. Find more information on Google Hangouts [here](#).

- Need a powerpoint? Find an assortment of presentations [here](#) (filter for trainings/webinars.)
- Don't forget these tools can be used for your own staff as well! Check out this [article](#) from media consultant firm Spitfire and this [article](#) from The Management Center on how to improve meetings in the digital space.
- Slack has made their standard service [free for non-profits for 3 months](#).
- **Tack-on** Census messaging. If your organization is doing any inreach or outreach events virtually, make sure that Census messaging is included.

Census Education through Printed Materials

- **Many households will likely continue to visit essential locations**, like their workplace, grocery stores, gas stations, or clinics. Consider hanging posters or dropping off census education materials for folks to pick up during a visit in the following locations:
 - Grocery stores & bodega check outs
 - Pharmacies
 - Laundromats
 - gas stations (particularly outside NYC)
 - places of worship if operating
 - food pick-up locations
 - clinics/hospitals
 - mechanic/auto parts stores
 - Banks
 - Elder care
 - Liquor stores
 - Utilities
 - Transportation hubs
 - Take-out restaurants/bars
 - Hardware and building material stores
 - Childcare
 - Animal hospitals

- **Identify partners**

- ***Work with local medical providers*** to place census literature in their waiting areas/on their screens. Click here for some potential messaging for screens.
- ***Identify Census ambassadors in buildings***, community boards and HSAs to circulate census letters and literature to all residents in their buildings or houses. Click here for a suggested email or letter to send. Ask your volunteers/listserves if they are willing to be an ambassador for their building/HSA.
- ***Distribute bumper stickers*** to gas stations for people to put on their car. Here are some suggested graphics for bumper stickers -- which, if printed, can be provided to gas stations, automotive shops and more!
- ***Work with your mayor and city government to utilize blank billboards***. Perhaps host an art competition for middle school or high school students on why the census matters to them. Place the winning art on blank billboards across the city!
- ***Host an art challenge and distribute the winner's work through various channels***. For example, F.Y. Eye put together the [Census 2020: Get Out the Count with F.Y. Eye](#) challenge which encourages local artists to create their own designs to inspire fellow New Yorkers to complete the 2020 Census. The art will be distributed at bodegas and pharmacies across hard-to-count neighborhoods and will be available for sale on the [Creative Action Network](#) platform.
- ***Work with faith leaders***. Chat with the faith leaders in your community and check-in about how they may be using technology at this time and how they may be able to spread the word about the Census and what you can do to support them. They might have access to a contact list of their congregants for potential phone/text-banking.
- ***Connect with Museums and Libraries***. A lot of museums and libraries are providing exhibitions, content and panels. Work with them to ensure they include Census messaging in their emails, or help them plan a Census panel that is streamable online!

- *Reach out to PTAs.* Many PTAs are looking to support content for their children at home. See if you can provide content for them to deliver (whether printed or video).
- **Still providing essential services?** Include Census messaging in any services still being provided.
- **Need printed materials to pull from?** Utilize materials from our website or national partners below:
 - [NY Counts GOTC Palm Cards](#)
 - [Printable 'I count' stickers](#)
 - [Printable brochures](#)
 - [Printable posters and flyers](#)
 - Downloadable materials from [Sesame Street Workshop](#) and [Nickelodeon](#)
 - [Printable Census Basics Handout](#)
 - [Printable postcard in 7 languages including English](#)
 - [Visit your local state partner's website for more state-specific materials](#)
 - [Additional brochures and flyers to print here and here](#)
- **Chalk Census messages on sidewalks** (to the extent that you can safely social distance while doing so).
- **Have postcards or notepaper at home, stamps and access to VAN?** Consider sending notes to people encouraging them to fill out the Census.

Press and Media Engagement

- **Work with your network to secure radio and TV interviews.** Make sure your spokesperson/spokespeople are prepped, see [tips on spokesperson training and development are linked here](#).
- **Consider placing radio or television ads in local media sources.** Check out [script ideas here](#) or email information@censuscounts for additional guidance on how to place local ads.
- **Consider pooling Google Ad Grants together for Census messaging.** More information on Google Ad Grants can be found [here](#).

Additional Resources at your disposal:

- **Census Counts ChatBot**
 - The Census Counts website now has a chat bot feature with thousands of answers to questions that can be shared online or by SMS. Text a question to 442020 or input a question in the chat box on censuscounts.org. The HelpDesk is automated and covers around 10,000+ topics about the census. It can also detect English and Spanish language text.
- **National GOTC groups have put together hotlines** that will continue to operate so households can contact someone if they have questions about the 2020 Census:
 - Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law: (888)-COUNT20 or (888)-268-6820
 - Arab American Institute: (833) 333-6864; (833)-3DDOUNI ("Count me" in Arabic)
 - Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC: (844) 202-API or (844) 202-0274
 - The hotline will be available in English, Mandarin (普通話), Cantonese (廣東話), Korean (한국어), Vietnamese (tiếng Việt), Tagalog, Urdu (اردو), Hindi (हिंदी), and Bengali/Bangla (বাংলা).
 - NALEO Educational Fund: (877)-EL-CENSO or (877)-352-3676
- Need to make sure your workplace is ready for COVID-19? Check out this [bank of resources from the National Center of Nonprofits](#) on how to make sure you keep your employees, yourself, your partners, and your organization safe-mentally, physically, and financially.
- Additionally, check out this [Business Continuity Disaster Recovery Plan Template](#) from Nonprofit New York

What can government agencies and LCCCs do?

Build Partnerships

- Government agencies and LCCCs can help CBOs spread awareness about the census by building partnerships with the agencies below and approaching those agencies with a specific ask to spread census education.
 - *Meals on Wheels/other meal delivery services/ home care services*
 - Set up a virtual training for Meals on Wheels staff on how to answer frequently asked questions about the census.
 - Ask Meals on Wheels staff to ask clients if they have completed their census during home visits.
 - *Food service providers*
 - Identify locations that are still providing food services (such as local food banks and schools) and ask if they can include a census flyer in each bag of food delivered -- show them what the content would look like to make the ask easier.
 - *Grocery Stores, Pharmacies, and Banks*
 - Ask local grocery stores, pharmacies, and banks if they are willing to hang a census poster or flyer on doors or near checkouts.
 - Ask these locations to include a note about the 2020 Census at the bottom of any printed receipts or ATM slips.
 - *Transportation*
 - Consider hanging census posters near bus stops, train stops, or other modes of transportation in your city.
 - Ask Uber, Lyft, and other taxi associations to share information about the census with their drivers.
 - *Schools*

- Develop content around the history and importance of the 2020 Census to be used by schools as part of their remote learning.
- **Any agency:** Census messaging can be included prominently on their website!

Messaging & Ad Buys

Government agencies and LCCCs can further help CBOs spread awareness about the census by continuing to push messaging and ads.

- Include census messaging on sanitation trucks and garbage cans.
- Purchase adbuys on Facebook, YouTube, and other digital spaces.
- Develop a sticker with census messaging to be placed on any state manufactured hand-sanitizer or soap dispensers.
- Produce content (such as videos or flyers) that CBOs can use on social media or can print.

What can national partners do?

Build Partnerships

- **Engage in national level conversations with large businesses** like Amazon, Walmart, Fresh Direct, Walgreens, CVS, and others to push census awareness and messaging to their customers
- **Identify social media influencers** and ask them to share census awareness messaging, directing their followers to complete the census now.
 - Who is an influencer?
 - A following of several thousand folks
 - Credible and not overwhelmingly controversial
 - Perhaps speaks the language(s) of your community
 - Examples:
 - A faith leader
 - A political leader
 - A local singer / performer / artist

- A bigger celebrity originally from that community or a sports star that plays in that community
 - Other organizations with wide followings could be great too
- **Communicate with colleges and young adult organizations** to push census awareness, specifically directing college students on how to complete the census using their address where they live and sleep most of the year.
- **Speak to the campaigns for them to message**

Materials & Field Support

- Coordinate and target in-language resources
- Designate a new day to be Census-celebration day

What can NY Counts 2020 do?

Build Partnerships

- Conduct virtual Census 101 trainings for new partners brought onboard
- Convene a space for census stakeholders to share outreach ideas in this time of transition
- Regularly converse with CBOs to determine needs and support GOTC efforts

Messaging and Media

- Help to develop content that can be shared on social media or through print
- Disseminate content and ideas of others

NEEDS:

- Radio toolkit- how to do it
- More money for radio and digital tools

Content to be developed

- Social media graphics in multiple languages
- Videos
- Slides/videos for use in waiting rooms
- Coronavirus related content (how healthcare and Census are inter-related); what to say when people ask why we are still focused on Census
- Flyers for grocery stores/pharmacies/home health services if they are willing to include in their bags/deliveries.