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Census 2010 and Human Services and Community Development


Mark Salling

Cleveland State University, m.salling@csuohio.edu

Jenita McGowan

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Census 2010, Human Services, and Community Development

By Mark Salling and Jenita McGowan

At this reading, you may have received your Census 2010 questionnaire in the mail, and you may already know that it is important for you to complete and return it. But you may not fully realize just how important it is, not only to return your own questionnaire, but to do what you can to urge your clients, constituents, co-workers, neighbors, and friends to complete and return theirs as well. If you are involved in or care about the human services sector and community development in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Northeast Ohio, or the State of Ohio, your help is needed.



Census Basics

The census is a count of everyone residing in the United States. All U.S. residents must be counted—people of all races and ethnic groups, both citizens and non-citizens. Census Day is April 1, 2010. Questionnaire responses should represent the household as it exists on this day. More detailed socioeconomic information will be collected annually from a small percentage of the population through the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS provides estimates of poverty, income, residential mobility, disabilities, educational attainment, housing characteristics, and a host of other data used to plan for community needs.

The U.S. Constitution requires a national census once every 10 years. The census will show state population counts and determine representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. It is also used for redistricting the Ohio General Assembly and local wards.

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Community Solutions Endorses Proposed 2.9 Mill Levy Renewal

By Sarah Kresnye

On May 4, Cuyahoga County voters will decide whether or not to renew the smaller of two critical human service levies. These levies provide the largest share of local support for programs through which county government and local agencies address the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. The Center for Community Solutions endorses the Health and Human Services Levy (Issue 15) and encourages Cuyahoga County citizens to support it as well.

Health and Human Services Levies

Cuyahoga County has two voted levies that support human services: 4.8 and 2.9 mills. The 4.8 mill levy collects \$146.7 million per year and the 2.9 mill renewal levy is expected to generate \$86.0 million in 2010. Those served by MetroHealth Medical Center, children, and the elderly are the primary beneficiaries of the protective services and health care that these dollars fund. However, availability of services is maintained for those times when any resident of the County may need assistance in dealing with a trauma or crisis. At all times, the entire community has access to the services provided throughout the county which are funded entirely, or in part, by these two levies.

History

In November, 2006, Cuyahoga County officials placed a 2.9 mill levy before voters well before the expiration of its predecessor, a 3.0 mill levy, at the end of 2007. Citizens voted (63-37) for a replacement levy to reduce the existing millage from 3.0 to 2.9 mills. A replacement levy allows the taxing district to begin a new tax levy that will collect the entire amount of millage the levy requests using calculations based on the current market value of the property. This levy's four-year life cycle ends in 2010.

The levy that will appear on the ballot in May is not a replacement levy, but a renewal levy, which would keep existing funding in place and would not be an increase to taxpayers. A renewal levy allows the taxing district to keep a current levy on the books and collect the same amount of money as when the original levy was voted in.

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Census (continued from pg. 1)



By Mark Salling, Ph.D.
Director of Research



By Jenita McGowan¹
Program Coordinator
Neighborhood Connections

Neighborhood Connections is working on the You Can Count on Me Ohio Census campaign with the goal of increasing the mail-back rate on completed census forms in designated (hard-to-count) census tracts.⁴

Census questionnaires are delivered or mailed to households via U.S. mail in March, 2010; many households will receive a replacement questionnaire in early April. Census workers will visit households that do not return questionnaires. The questionnaire is quick, easy, and confidential. With only 10 questions, the 2010 Census questionnaire is one of the shortest questionnaires in history and takes just 10 minutes to complete. By law, the Census Bureau cannot share an individual's census questionnaire responses with anyone, including other federal agencies and law enforcement entities.

The Census Bureau started planning for the 2010 census even before the 2000 census was fully completed. In the fall of 2008, local census job recruitment began in order to gear-up for operations at the local level. Last year census employees went door-to-door to update address lists nationwide, and local Complete Count committees were established. Beginning on March 15, census questionnaires will be mailed or delivered to households. From May through July, census takers will visit households that did not return a questionnaire by mail.² By law, the Census Bureau delivers population counts to the president for apportionment by December 31, 2010. By April 1, 2011, the Census Bureau must complete delivery of data to states—consisting of population counts by race, Hispanic origin, and voting age—for census blocks, municipalities, counties, and other units of geography for redistricting within the state. The census also includes questions on household composition, gender, age, and housing tenure (own versus rent), and these data will be reported in mid-to-late 2011.

Why is the Census so Important?

Every year, the federal government allocates about \$400 billion to states and communities based, in part, on census data. That is \$10 trillion over 10 years! Over \$300 billion annually goes to grants for programs in housing, education,

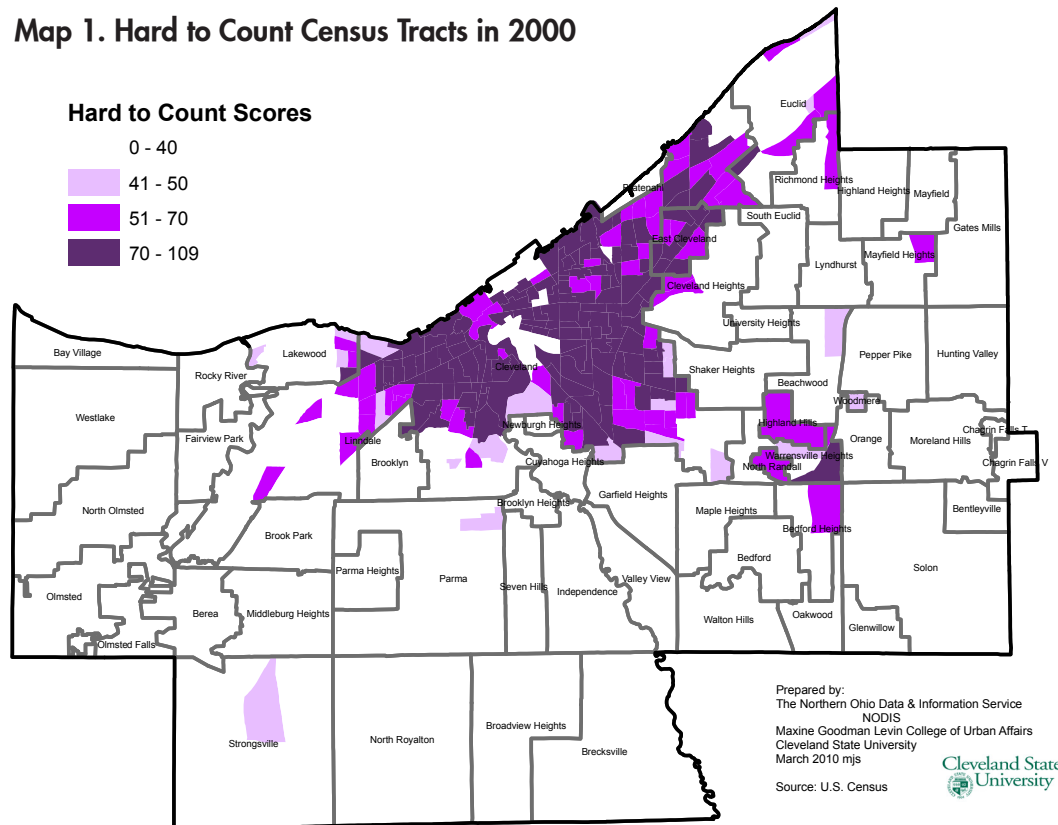
health, crime prevention, and infrastructural necessities. States use the census to develop funding formulas that result in allocations to counties and cities. In fiscal year 2007, for example, Ohio's federal domestic assistance allocation, based on the 2000 Census, was over \$14 billion.

Examples of programs that are affected include: Title 1 grants to educational agencies (school districts); Head Start programs; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (food grants); public transportation; road rehabilitation and construction; programs for the elderly; emergency food and shelter; empowerment zones; distribution of congressional seats to states; and the drawing of Congressional, state House and Senate, and local district lines.

Many of the distributed funds trickle down to government, non-profit agencies, and community organizations that serve everyday needs. Cities and neighborhoods that are significantly undercounted are at a disadvantage for resources. The hard-to-count (HTC) population is largely in urban areas, inner-city neighborhoods, and first ring suburbs (see Map 1). Traditionally, HTC census tracts have low census form mail-back rates. In Ohio, these tracts had 10.8 percent of the enumerated state population in 2000, 18.8 percent of Cuyahoga County's, and 50.2 percent of Cleveland's. Despite efforts to count the population in these tracts, it is likely that there were many more missed in these neighborhoods than elsewhere. In order to ensure that funds are distributed fairly, we need a strong and complete count and one that does not penalize the underrepresented and underserved in our cities.

Community planners and governments rely on census data to determine where there is a need for additional social services and funding. For the nonprofit community, census data are used for writing grant proposals. It helps to estimate both the number of potential volunteers in the community and the number of residents who may need specific services.

Map 1. Hard to Count Census Tracts in 2000



10 Ways to Help with the 2010 Census

Here are some ways that your organization can help:

1. Educate your organization about the Census. See and download excellent materials at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/>. Get material from this Website or contact one of the local Census Bureau offices listed at the end of this article.
2. Display Census brochures and posters in a prominent place.
 - Make sure your social workers, case managers, day care providers, and case workers hand out a census brochure to their clients and customers.
 - Place posters in every room that your clients/customers spend time in.
 - Set up your phone message so that it reminds callers of the importance of the census.
 - Explain to your clients and customers why they should fill out the census form.
3. Have staff on hand who can answer census questions.
4. Keep a stack of sample Census forms at your organization.
5. Pay special attention to those you serve who may have language barriers.
6. Reach out to people who have moved because of foreclosure or eviction. They should still be counted even if they are “doubling up” in someone else’s home.
7. Include census education as a part of your everyday outreach and interactions, including Website widgets and email signatures.
8. Reach out to other organizations in your network and share what you know about the census.
9. Ask the Census which organizations in your community have been designated as a “Be Counted Center” or a “Questionnaire Assistance Center” and guide people who need help in completing their census questionnaires to these organizations for help.
10. Find out if the Census Bureau is still hiring and, if so, sign up to host census employment testing or training (call the Census Recruitment office, 216-377-4423).

The census is especially important to Cleveland. It has been estimated that, for every 100 people not counted during the Census, Greater Cleveland will lose \$1.2 million over the next decade in federally funded programs. In other words, for every person not counted, this community can lose between \$1,200-\$1,500 every year for 10 years.

One might ask, since the ACS provides detailed socioeconomic and housing data throughout the decade, even to the neighborhood level, why do we need the 2010 census counts? The problem is that the ACS is a sample, and all of its estimates are calibrated by the complete count items for which data are collected from every person, household, and housing unit. Without a census, the ACS would not have a true population count with which to estimate the many characteristics it produces. Furthermore, the Census Bureau also estimates population for states, counties, and municipalities annually, starting with the accurate data produced from the decennial census and then updated based on additional data collected by the Census Bureau throughout the decade. These estimates then are used to calibrate the annual estimates from the ACS. So errors in the decennial census are propagated to the annual population estimates and then to the ACS and such closely watched social and economic markers as poverty, education, transportation needs, and more. Undercounts hurt our understanding of the depth and the geographic distribution of the needs, assets, and resources of our population.

Community Solutions, NEO CANDO at Case, and other organizations use these census data for providing and reporting on the social indicators on which so many human service and community organizations rely for strategic planning and grant applications. The funding community also uses these data and our reporting on them to help determine the community needs that guide their funding priorities.

Indeed, what would we do without good census data?

Nonprofits Are Key to a Complete Count

Nonprofits are in a unique position to provide education and motivation around census participation. Nonprofits maintain ongoing, trusting relationships with the people they serve. They can be powerful vehicles for encouraging their communities to return the census questionnaire or respond to census workers.

Lower-income and more mobile populations, precisely those served by many nonprofits, are frequently undercounted by the census, leading to under-funding of critical services and infrastructure and under-representation in government. Nonprofits can play an important role in making sure their communities are fully and accurately counted by educating them on the importance of the census and how to participate.

What You Can Do

In January, Community Solutions and the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University sponsored a Levin Forum on the subject of the 2010 Census and the human services and community development communities. This was part of the efforts of the Cleveland Complete Count Committee to promote the census in the city.³ It was clear in the question-and-answer portion of the event that many of the community’s leaders realize how critical a complete count is for the city and its neighborhoods.

The time for planning is over, but you can help by getting the word out. Please join our efforts in promoting the census and ensuring the complete count.

A complete count helps Cleveland and its neighborhoods, as well as the inner ring and other communities that are often undercounted, underrepresented, and underfunded. The human services community has a stake and can help. It only happens every 10 years—now is the time!