

Exploring US Census & Message Perceptions of Rural American Indian Residents

Prepared for:



By:



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Aims

- ▶ Assess attitudes, barriers to participation in 2020 Census
- ▶ Test prior messages
- ▶ Develop a strategy for future public education and outreach

Methods

- ▶ Three focus groups - high AI/AN population areas
- ▶ AI/AN adults who have lived in rural area in last 10 years
- ▶ Moderator guide
 - ▶ Knowledge
 - ▶ Barriers
 - ▶ Citizenship Question
 - ▶ Past materials



Executive Summary & Implications

A lack of benefit awareness and deeply rooted suspicion of anything government related.

Messaging that strikes a careful balance between honoring heritage, acknowledging personal capability, inspiring positive patriotism, and calling out the direct impact that participation.

High impact, persuasive community messaging aimed at Native Americans should strive to...

1. **Acknowledge and respect the capabilities and accomplishments of Native people** in the present day to connect on a personally relevant level.

The vast majority of those who participated in this exploratory project have directly experienced discrimination based on their heritage, being seen as less than regardless of personal accomplishments (e.g., home ownership, higher education attainment, employment status, skilled trade/career, community service, advocacy, etc.). Imagery that represents Native people as competent, progressive individuals resonates strongly in overcoming poor treatment experienced.

Some concerns were expressed about imagery closely associated with Native stereotypes. Such imagery is likely best avoided.

2. **Inspire hope for the future that doesn't require compromising Native pride** or becoming assimilated into mainstream culture.

Participating in the census as a means to “speak for the generations of Native people before us and for those yet to come” is a highly appealing (**FAMILY and GENERATIONS** (j) statement- #1 most compelling by a notable margin).

The frustration of having to compromise ethnic identity in order to be successful in mainstream culture is provoked by certain imagery from the 2010 campaign. Future campaigns should be extremely careful to avoid reflecting this perception through cautious curation of clothes, hair and the physical affect of models used, striving for a balance between modern/competent and an respectful connection to heritage.



Executive Summary & Implications (Cont'd)

High impact, persuasive community messaging should strive to...

3. Foster positive patriotism vs. government control when addressing participation.

Fulfilling a civic duty is a far more compelling motivator to participate in the U.S. Census versus the forceful, borderline threatening positioning of being “legally required by the constitution”.

“Civic duty” inspires pride in one’s country, especially for those who have served in the U.S. military or have family who have served. In strong contrast, a coercive constitutional obligation elicits painful historic context regarding generations of government sanctioned oppression.

4. Highlight specific benefits that participation in the U.S. Census has for Native communities, especially:

1. Federal funding for community schools, housing, healthcare facilities and roads
2. Better political visibility and representation

In terms of reach, dissemination of optimized messaging is best achieved through a mix of direct mail/online and trusted community channels.

Leveraging the highest preferred census participation channels, physical mail and online/digital media, for messaging is highly recommend for tier 1 media planning.

Trusted community resource centers directly impacted by federal funding are also an ideal place to get the word out as well as providing the opportunity to participate in the 2020 Census onsite (e.g., schools, social services, hospitals/healthcare centers, etc.).



U.S. Census Perceptions





What it Means to be an “American”

The label “American” conjures a broad, often conflicting range of emotions. Some regions tend to subscribe more to mainstream patriotism. This is in strong contrast to some focus group members who openly struggle with discrimination and lack of community resources. Another group fell in the middle, finding value (and drawbacks) in both sides of mainstream American culture.



Rapid City



Flagstaff



Tulsa

“Define the word American. I was born here. My family is Schiangu Lakota from the Burnt Thigh Nation. I can't say I feel something I don't believe is real. Yes, I am a citizen of the United States. But my family culture and background is Lakota Indian.” - Rapid City

“The word “American” is like an expensive brand name. It's a name someone gave people as a whole because of prestige and glorified ideals. Americans carry the ideals of freedom but I feel these freedoms only extend so far.” -Rapid City

“Yes, I feel like an American. I have contributed to this country by voting, working, etc. I feel as some First Nations or host people. But “American” brings up colonization and what first immigrants that came and brought destruction to our people through greed and bad haircuts.” - Flagstaff

“I don't really feel like I belong anywhere. I am half Navajo and have been judged and looked at differently because of that.” - Flagstaff

“I am a proud American, But I identify as Native American and I am proud of my heritage. I am proud of where we have come from and I am excited for where we are going.” - Tulsa

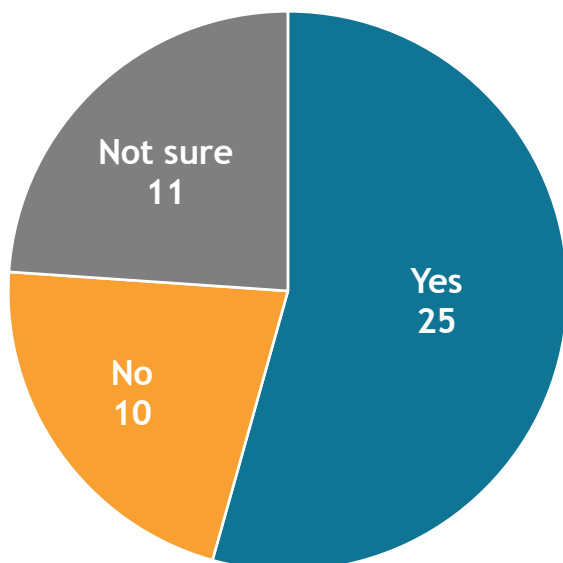
“I have the opportunity to vote, to be free, to accomplish anything I put my mind to. I've always been very patriotic and love this country even though there are issues, but it is still the best country ever established.” - Tulsa



General Knowledge & Past Participation

There is considerably low awareness of how U.S. Census data is actually used, regardless of past participation. Some know that it has something to do with community funding or political representation. Others have questions or are suspicious.

PARTICIPATED IN ANY U.S. CENSUS*



*From focus group participant signup.

*"I honestly **don't** see much benefit in it personally."* - Tulsa

*"Doesn't mean anything to me. It **hasn't** effected me in any way."* - Flagstaff

"They need to explain it more to people." - Rapid City

*"Let's us know **what areas** need to be serviced more or less."* - Tulsa

*"Initially, I think it was meant to **keep count** of the population growth."* - Flagstaff

*"Keeping track of **bloodline**, people get jobs."* - Rapid City

*"It seems like it is to count of the growth of the **'minority'** population."* - Flagstaff

"I avoid taking it. It's a way to get people to act or assimilate to the American ideal." - Rapid City

*"When it comes to the government, there's **nothing positive** about it."* - Rapid City



U.S. Census Content is Not Off-putting

Few concerns are expressed with the census form itself, most relating to minor frustrations with providing more specificity (tribal affiliation) than other heritage groups are asked to provide. However, concerns surrounding data accuracy and usage/misusage are prevalent.

"I think the census is helpful. The demographic research it provides is helpful on local and state levels." -Flagstaff

"I stumbled upon percentage of races in the U.S. and Native Americans were 0.004%. That could not possibly be right." - Tulsa

**Data
Accuracy**

**Distrust
and Misuse**

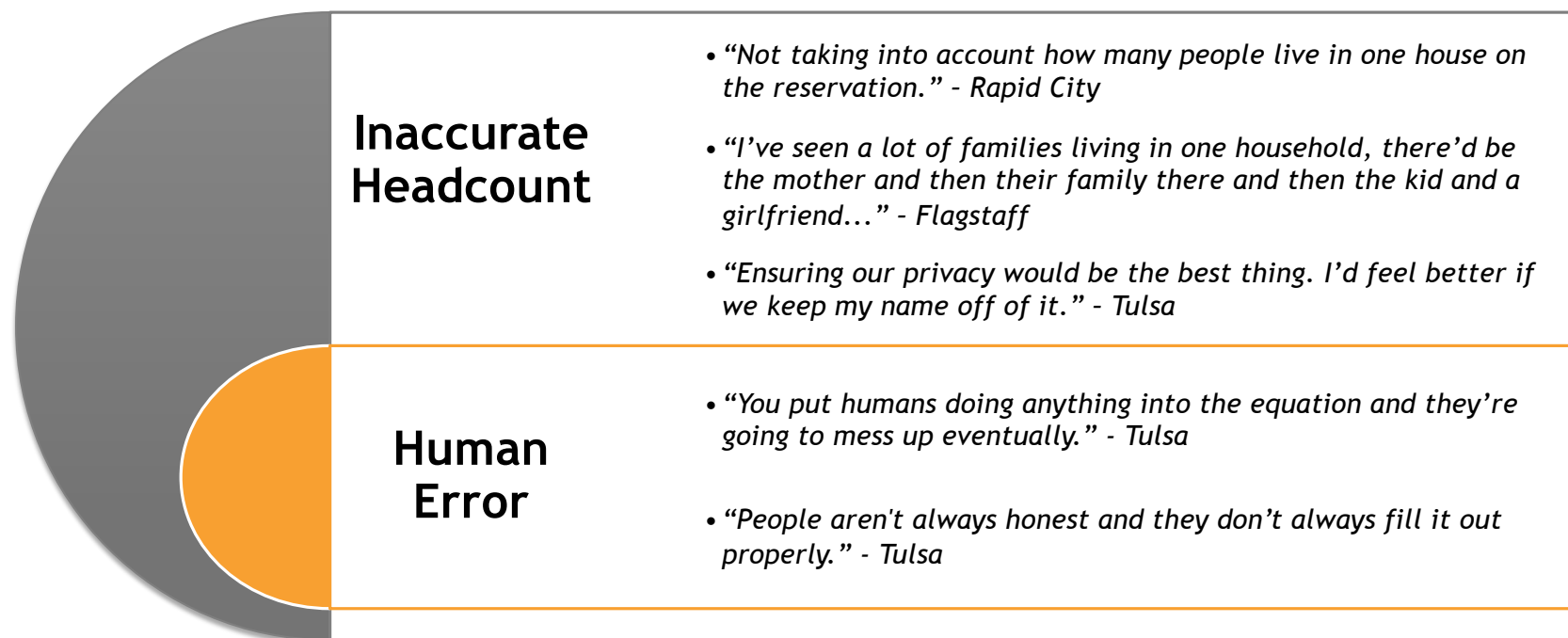
"The census, could be weaponized for different means that we may not be aware of." -Flagstaff



Concerns Relating to Census Data Accuracy

Several participants question how accurate the U.S. Census actually is due to low participation rates among Native communities, logistics on shared household counts, omission due to privacy concerns, and simple human error.

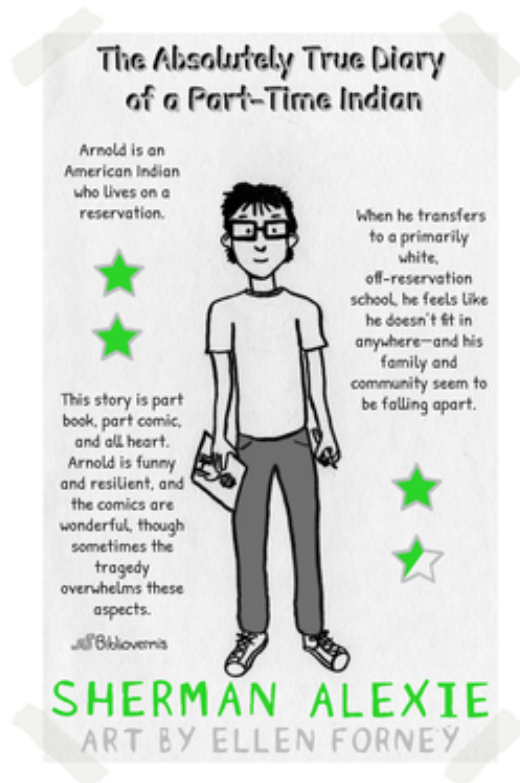
“Native Americans have the lowest percentages of the census so it basically says we don't exist.” - Flagstaff





Barrier to U.S. Census Accuracy: Code Switching

Battling stereotypes, poor treatment and doors closing to a variety of opportunities prompt many American Indians to “code switch” and represent themselves as other races, such as White or Latino. Some actively avoiding reporting race on official documents for this reason.



“I used to check the white box because it’s not cool to be Indian. I wonder if more people are doing that” - Tulsa

“They ask you what your race is. If I put down Native American, I won’t get a call back.” - Rapid City

“I’m glad my son is pretty light skinned so he don’t have to go through it.” - Rapid City

“I’m considered an apple. I’m a half-breed. Red on the outside, white on the inside.” - Rapid City

“I am very, very proud to be Native. My daughter will swear she’s not Native American, she’s Mexican.” - Flagstaff

“I feel displaced. I grew up here my entire life, I could never go to the reservation. I also feel the impact of being treated differently because I’m not white as well. I’ve advocated for people and when they see a Native woman, they look above your head.” - Flagstaff



Concerns Relating to Distrust and Misuse

Suspicion of anything related to the U.S. government is a natural consequence of historically poor treatment of American Indians. Whether or not to participate in the census, and accept related messaging at face value, is not always an easy decision. Most Native people want more details as well as to be able to see a direct benefit to their community before participating.

"If it's used properly, it can be an amazing tool. But like most things if misused it could be disastrous." - Tulsa

History of Betrayal

"I respect the law, but to me it's the government since day one has tried to kill my culture." - Rapid City

"Elder Natives feel it's not going to help. My grandparents who were raised in boarding schools that got abused for speaking Native language, they don't trust government." - Tulsa

Low Awareness of Purpose

"A way to divide people. Although the government says it's for funding, I think this is a bigger deal that we are not aware of." - Flagstaff

"Just another way to keep track of us." - Rapid City

Deliver on Previous Claims

"We're going to bring in housing with the 2010 Census. Ok, well you guys lied. Why should I even complete it?" - Rapid City

"I bought my home outside the reservation because it's so difficult to go through the homesite lease. You're allowed one acre. You can't even have your outhouse outside that one acre." - Flagstaff



Reactions to Citizenship Question Being Considered for 2020

Many focus group participants were not bothered by the addition of a citizenship status question. Many, however, question the value of such a question, feeling that immigrants would be unlikely to take part - especially considering general resistance to take part in the census among Native communities whose citizenship is rarely under question.

Is this person a citizen of the United States?

☐ Yes, born in the United States

☐ Yes, born in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Northern Marianas

☐ Yes, born abroad of U.S. citizen parent or parents

☐ Yes, U.S. citizen by naturalization – *Print year of naturalization* ➤

☐ No, not a U.S. citizen

“I’m an American. I’ve got my credentials, so I don’t have a problem. If I was trying to hide something I’d have a problem.” - Flagstaff

“I don’t know. If someone is not a citizen, why would they want to fill the damn thing out. It should say on that paper, even if you aren’t a US citizen you won’t get in trouble for filling it out.” - Rapid City

“Count everyone everywhere, no exceptions.” - Tulsa



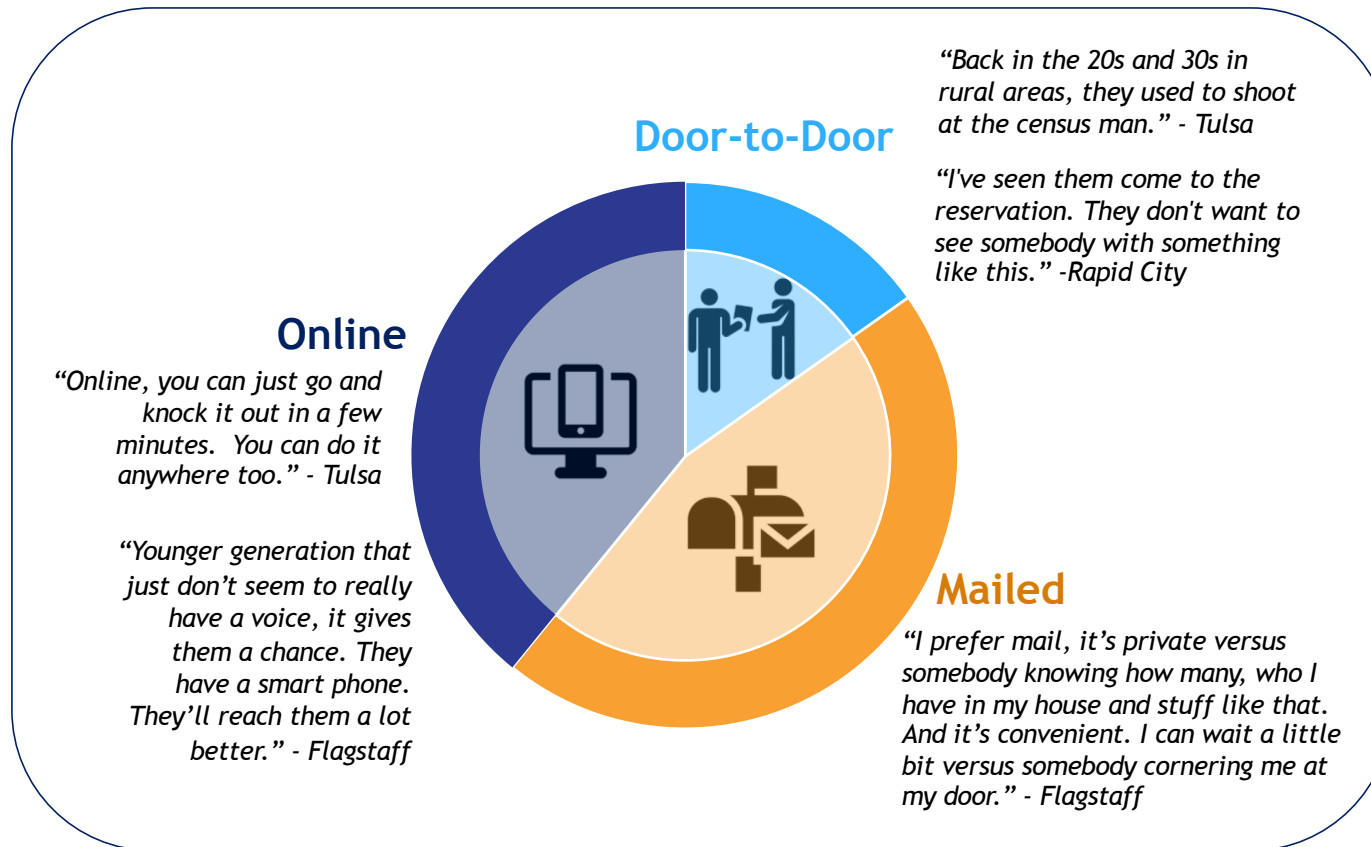
Reaching American Indians





Best Way to Participate in the U.S. Census

Of the four options presented, most say they would prefer to take part in the U.S. Census either online or by traditional mail. Response to door-to-door was mixed. Some see benefit in the in-person modality for the elderly and those with limited education or language barriers, others finding the idea of an home visit intrusive or even threatening.





Other Channels and Outreach Methods

While online or mail efforts are sufficient for most, many feel that the U.S. Census needs to extend reach through a wider range of community-focused efforts through trusted channels that reflect a deeper cultural understanding. Offering the census in tribal language(s) was seen mainly as a novelty, but those in Flagstaff do feel it's needed to effectively reach elders.

"My generation has no clue about the census. They need another method. Be more inventive." - Tulsa

Community Outreach

"I just recently registered to vote through the Creek Nation. They send out newsletters and things like that." - Tulsa

"Go to the Indian hospitals, the different places where we interact." - Tulsa

Accessible Medium

"It just needs to be broken down to something that is easier for people like on the reservation that didn't finish school." - Rapid City

"A lot of elderly people around the reservation, or even off, don't speak English." - Flagstaff

"I would do that in Cherokee language. I'd fill it out, but I'd keep it to myself. I'd just want to see it." - Tulsa

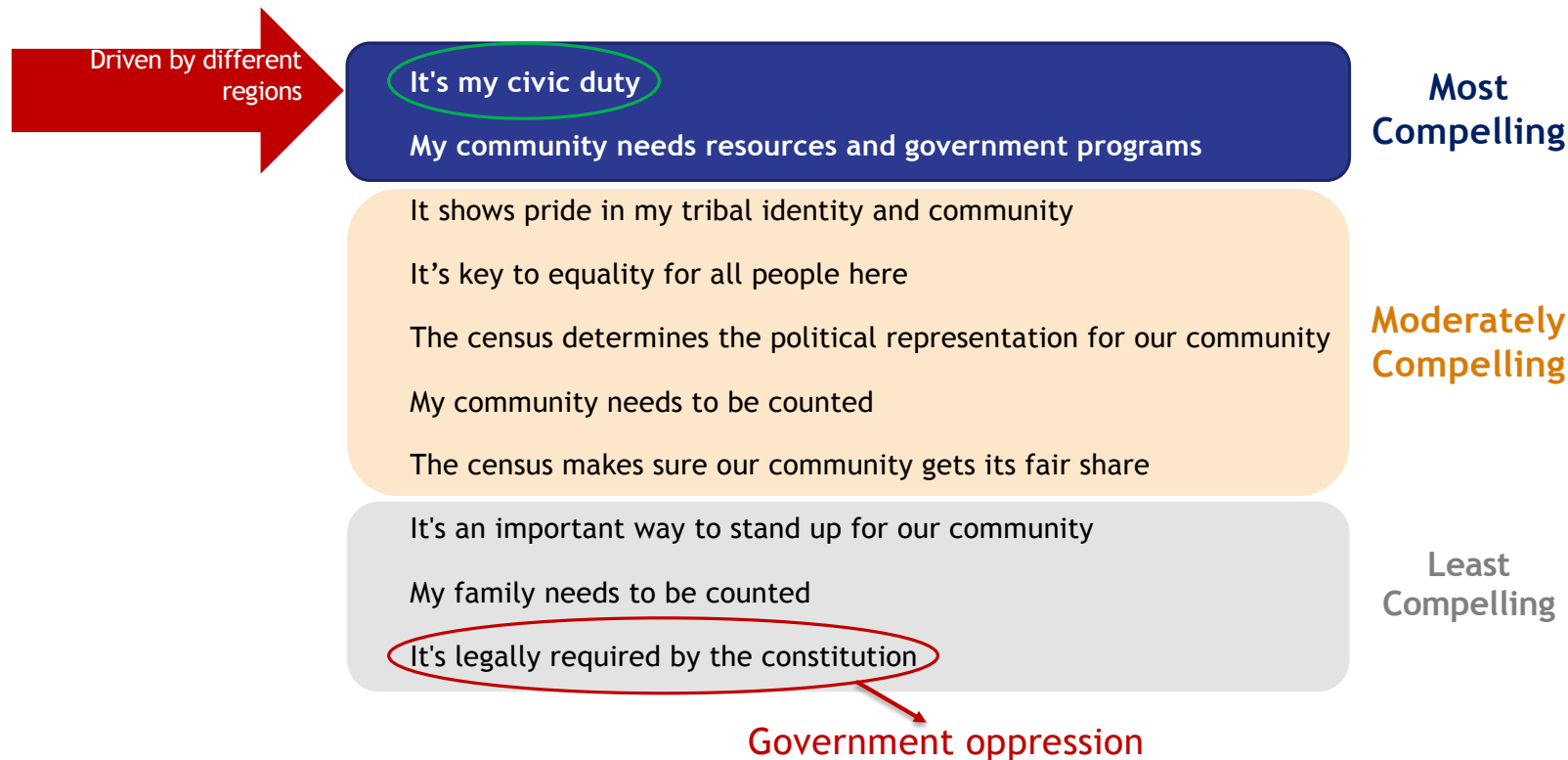
Incentives

I know a lot of people who won't fill something real thick out unless they are going to get something right then and there." - Rapid City



“Reasons to Participate” That Resonate

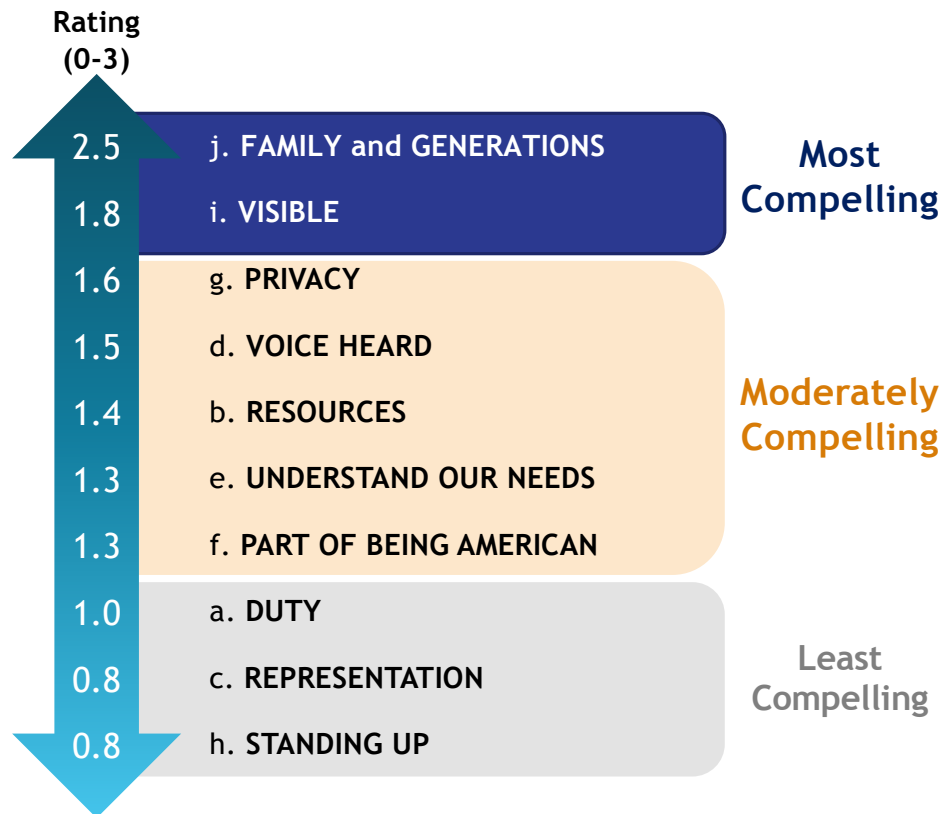
Each group reviewed 10 reasons that might encourage someone to participate in the U.S. Census. They then picked the top three (#1, then two additional) that were the most compelling to them personally. While following through on civic duty is a key driver (vastly more inspiring than “required” constitutional messaging and driven by strong patriotism in Tulsa area participants), taking action to support community needs is also highly compelling across geographies visited.





Reactions to Persuasive Message Statements

Persuasive Message Statements Ratings Summary



Key Themes

1. Underline anything that stands out

- Garnering more resources and visibility for Native communities
- Legacy statements related to honoring past generations and contributing to a better future
- Fulfilling civic duty (a negative when positioned as a requirement)

2. Cross out anything you don't like

- Idea of combating racism/discrimination and inequality via census participation is not seen as very believable
- Being forced/required to participate is off-putting for many
- Concerns that information can be/is kept confidential

3. Question mark next to anything confusing

- The word "American" elicits mixed appeal due to differing interpretations on what the term really means

Persuasive Statements Breakdown: Most Compelling

Multi-generation/legacy visibility and specific types of impact for Native communities (schools, housing, healthcare, roads etc.) are key drivers to the appeal of the most two most compelling statements reviewed.

Statement Review instructions

1. Underline anything that stands out
2. Cross out anything you don't like
3. Question mark next to anything confusing

j. FAMILY and GENERATIONS*

Census data is critical. By participating, we speak for the generations of native people before us and for those yet to come. Census data can help determine our native communities' needs for schools, housing, health care facilities and roads. It also brings business investment to build the economy and thriving communities.

i. VISIBLE*

We want to make sure that the American Indian and Alaska Native community, which is growing every day, is not invisible. Filling out the census will ensure our community is counted, heard, and visible.

*Statement title not shown to respondents, only the statement itself (as printed in individual group handouts).



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Persuasive Statements Breakdown: Moderately Compelling

Defining an “American” is a highly complex and loaded topic for most American Indians. Statements that use this term tend to have middling appeal due to a lack of clarity/differing opinions on what the term really means. Messaging that focuses on clear and direct positive impact on Native communities is well liked.

Statement Review instructions

1. Underline anything that stands out
2. Cross out anything you don't like
3. Question mark next to anything confusing

g. PRIVACY*

The information you fill out in the census is kept highly confidential and secure. Census Bureau employees are prohibited by law from sharing any personal information with anyone, not even law enforcement agencies like FBI. ~~You can feel comfortable knowing your responses will be kept private.~~

d. VOICE HEARD*

The census is an important way to make sure that you, your family, and your tribe's voice is heard. Making sure you are counted by participating in the census can express your pride in who you are as a Native person.

b. RESOURCES*

Census data is used to determine not only federal government funding for programs and services, but businesses also use it to decide where to invest and create jobs or build housing. Filling out the census makes sure that you, your family, and your community get a fair shot at those resources.

e. UNDERSTAND OUR NEEDS*

~~Completing the census is about more than communicating with our leaders.~~ It provides valuable information to all other Americans, helping other Americans understand our community, our needs, and our valuable contributions to this country.

f. PART OF BEING AMERICAN*

~~Filling out the census every 10 years is just a part of being an ?American?.~~ By filling out the form and making your voice heard, you will be more fully participating in our democracy and joining a long-standing ?American tradition?.

*Statement title not shown to respondents, only the statement itself (as printed in individual group handouts).



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Persuasive Statements Breakdown: Least Compelling

Messages of dissent and frustration with inequality and lack of representation resonate for many, but most don't see participating the U.S. Census as a way to effectively combat it, leading statements to garner the lowest ratings. Being forced to participate (vs. feeling a civic duty/pride) does not resonate well with most.

Statement Review instructions

1. Underline anything that stands out
2. Cross out anything you don't like
3. Question mark next to anything confusing

a. DUTY*

Participation in the census is ~~required~~ by the Constitution, and ~~it is everyone's civic duty to make sure we have equal and accurate representation by completing the census.~~ We should all follow the law and participate in the census.

c. REPRESENTATION*

~~?Filling out the census makes sure that you are represented in elections.~~ In the ten years since the last census in 2010, your community has probably changed a lot, and filling out the census is critical to making sure you have equal representation in government.?

h. STANDING UP*

~~?People trying to divide and discriminate against our community are counting on us not to participate. Filling out the census is a way to stand up, be counted, and say no to racism and discrimination?~~

*Statement title not shown to respondents, only the statement itself (as printed in individual group handouts).



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Reactions to Census 2010 Ads



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Summary of Key Themes Across Census 2010 Execution Styles

Specific feedback varies by individual ad, with certain themes emerging across execution styles. A concern raised in every area visited was a lack of emphasis on bottom-line impact- what does the U.S. Census really *do* for us?



Action Series

POSITIVE

- Sense of history/multigenerational legacy alongside progress

NEGATIVE

- Tagline alludes to ancestors being forced into cooperation with the U.S. government, highlighting a history that is painful vs. inspiring
- Some appear dismissive of traditional roots, being “whiter” is glorified



Awareness Series

POSITIVE

- Reflect a range of respectful Native personas, from traditional to progressive

NEGATIVE

- Skepticism on messaging, lacking connection between taking the census and having a generational voice or impact
- Imagery limits application to select tribes/nations, some concern for racial stereotypes



Confidentiality Series

POSITIVE

- Positive heritage
- Honors elders
- Relatable and personal
- Not tribal specific, inclusive

NEGATIVE

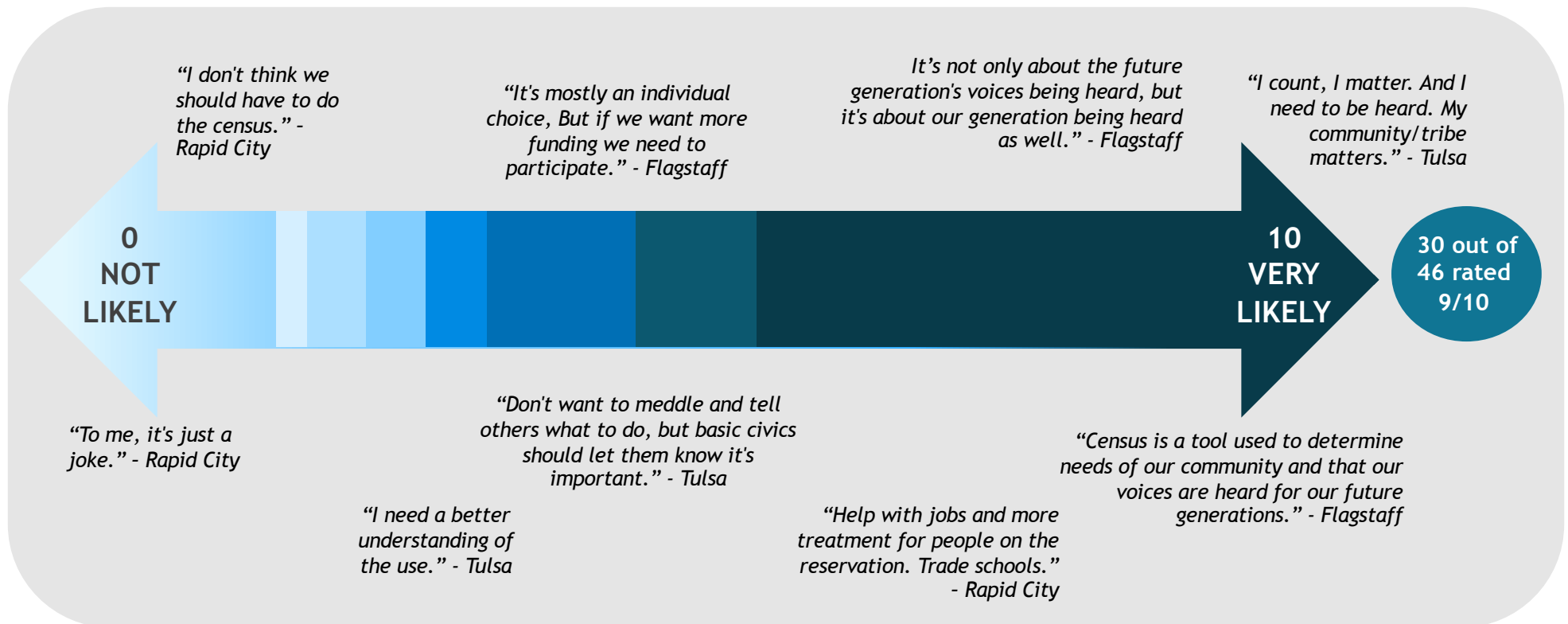
- Not specific on census benefits and impact, no call to action
- Assurance of confidentiality is not believable for many

Overall Impact of Ads & Messaging



Likely to Encourage Friends & Family to Participate (end of group)

Making a commitment to persuade others to participate in a government project can be a touchy subject for many American Indians. However, after learning more about specific benefits from increasing Native participation the U.S. Census, most feel compelled to get the word out.



Complementing the Census CBAMS 2020

Motivators to respond

- ▶ Participants expressed a desire to learn more about the census and its process, applications, and impact on them. Some also wanted to know what the Census Bureau is and what it does with census information.
- ▶ Participants stated a need for funding of community improvement projects. They identified the key institutions of schools and hospitals as the leading beneficiaries of such funding.
- ▶ Emphasizing the importance of trusted voices, some said they participated because they knew the person at the door.

Attitudinal barriers

- ▶ Among all AIAN groups, concerns of privacy proved to be the most widely cited barrier for filling out the census form.
- ▶ In multiple cases, participants attributed their lack of previous or potential future participation to privacy concerns—whether it was not feeling comfortable divulging personal information to an unknown enumerator or sending private information through a form.

Note: Audience insights are based on focus group data only because there were concerns about the ability to obtain unbiased data for this group using a quantitative survey.

Insights from:
Team Y&R 