



How to Engage with Rural Communities about the 2020 Census in the wake of COVID-19

The disruption to census operations in the wake of COVID-19 can be felt especially by rural communities and those with limited access to the internet. The Census Counts campaign has pulled together helpful tips and tools for outreach to rural communities in the time of COVID-19.

Hand delivery of census packets (update/ leave operation) to households in some rural communities and those where most homes receive mail at P.O. boxes were suspended, due to COVID-19. As a result, many households in rural areas have not yet received their census packet including a paper questionnaire and unique ID to respond to the 2020 Census by phone or online. Census Bureau has [announced](#) a targeted and phased approach to resume *some* 2020 Census field operations in compliance with federal, state, and local health guidance. Census Counts campaign background and resources for census outreach to communities in update/ leave areas is [available here](#). These households can still participate in the 2020 Census online or by phone without their unique ID. New America has developed a guide for responding without a unique ID [available here](#).

Here are a few ways to engage with rural communities from their preferred mode of communication:

Set up a Tele-town Hall. In civic engagement work, tele-town halls are a proven outreach strategy to engage rural communities. You can set up tele-town halls a number of ways with different budgets in mind to recruit participants or to auto dial households to patch them into the call.

- Refer to the Census Counts campaign [tele-town hall planning guide](#) to support your outreach. This document is meant to be used as a guide that can be adjusted and tailored to each states' individual needs for their own town halls.

Phone banking. Set up a phone banking program using VAN to call households and talk to them about the census. Remember to ensure that organizers can phone bank without needing the internet by sending (phone or email) phone scripts, the list of numbers, and resources to organizers ahead of time.

- When doing phone and SMS outreach, make sure you follow the provisions of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA). The National Consumer Law Center has created an overview of [census reminders and TCPA compliance](#). TCPA does not apply at all to calls to home or business landlines unless the calls are made for the purposes of selling goods or services.
- Phone numbers are available through the State Voices census VAN that has been supplemented by Melissa data, meaning 95% of households are included. To request access to a phone list please email accessstfa@statevoices.org.
- The National Congress of American Indians has compiled a helpful virtual canvassing guide that is [available here](#).

For more information or additional questions about the resources listed, contact Sonum Nerurkar, Census Get Out the Count Manager for the Census Counts Campaign at Nerurkar@civilrights.org.



- Ask organizers to call friends and family and talk to them about the census.

Radio and Local TV. Contact your local radio or television station to ask to speak on air about the importance of the census. Ask if the local program would do a segment on the census and if you can be interviewed remotely on the importance in that community. Ask if the station provides PSA space for census ads or, budget permitting, purchase ads.

- Find talking points on the 2020 Census [here](#).
- Find sample scripts for census radio or TV ads [here](#).
- Census Bureau radio PSA are available for promotion, translation and co-branding [here](#).
- Search for your local radio stations [here](#).

Mailing. Consider sending a census reminder mailing to rural households that include an “it’s not too late” message and provide instructions on how to complete the 2020 Census by returning the paper questionnaire by mail, by phone or online. Ensure that your mailing is translated into languages spoken in your community.

- Consider working with your county officials and local post masters in small rural post offices to provide educational materials to PO Box mail recipients. Households that receive their mail via a P.O. box may not have received their census packet yet and could be confused about how to participate.
 - Case study: The King County community development agency worked with their local postmaster general to place pre-paid postage 6.5 x 9 flyers into PO Boxes.
- Find an example of a census mailer [here](#).

Partner with service providers or essential business. Provide census flyers, and other promotional materials to service providers and local businesses to distribute to patrons. This includes locations like grocery stores, gas stations, and direct service providers like food banks.

- Ready Nation developed resources and toolkits for businesses supporting census participation. Find the resources [here](#).
 - Case study: Coalitions and CCCs in San Antonio, Colorado and Florida have added a census message to receipts at local essential businesses like Dollar General or Dollar Tree. It costs up to \$250 per store. Contact ShopperLocal for more information (Rick Lorch, rlorch@rtn.net, 317-379-7429).
- See the Community Action Partnership toolkit for service providers [here](#).

Wi-Fi Hotspots. If there is a community that cannot access the internet, provide wi-fi hotspots in key essential locations for people to use and fill out the census. [See more information here](#).