

## Census 2020: Why It Matters to You

By Megan Tennermann, AICP, Planner

Next year, the United States will embark on the Census of Population, a once-every-decade undertaking meant to count everyone one residing in the United States “once, only once, and in the right place”. This count will determine each state’s number of congressional representatives, as well as each state’s, county’s, and municipality’s share of approximately \$689 billion in population-based program funding. Additionally, because the Census is an extensive and short-term operation, many employees are needed on the ground across the country to gather data in person; jobs range from six weeks to 18 months in length.

### History of US Census

The Census was mandated by the United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 2) for purposes of ensuring equal representation in Congress. The original idea was that each representative should represent 30,000 people, with a minimum of one representative per state. That became unworkable as the population increased, and the Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929 capped the number of representatives at 435. This has its own issues, notably an imbalance in the relative weight of electoral votes between small and large states, but a Congress consisting of one representative per 30,000 people would currently have 11,000 voting members, a large size for a legislative body. Census data is used on the state, county and municipal levels as well to ensure fair and equal representation; the County Legislative Districts were redrawn and approved in 2013 based on the 2010 Census data.

As the Census continued every ten years, the government and business owners began to realize that the data being collected could also inform the types of businesses and services needed in a community, and the Census was moved to the Department of Commerce in 1790, shortly after the first census was conducted.

### Census By Numbers

**\$689 Billion** of federal funding is allocated to **132 different programs** throughout the United States. Approximately **330 million people** were counted in the 2010 Census, apportioning the **435 Congressional Representatives** within the **50 States**.

### Why Does the Census Matter?

Today, in an estimate based on federal fiscal year 2015, the federal government uses Census Bureau data to distribute over \$689 billion through 132 programs. Examples of such programs are highway planning and construction, Medicare and Medicaid, Community Development Block Grants, food stamps and school lunches, Pell grants for college students, special education funding and Head Start programs, capital investment for transit, and assistance for people with disabilities. These programs have the common element of supporting people and their needs as opposed to maintaining land or buildings or supporting government officials. This money goes directly to our communities.

It is important to note that funding is distributed and representatives are apportioned based on raw numbers rather than individual responses. Title 13 of the United States Code protects the privacy of all Census responses for 72 years, the average lifetime of Americans at the time the code was adopted. Your personal information is safe—it cannot be given out to anyone, including the FBI with warrants. Census Bureau employees and others governed by Title 13 face up to a \$250,000 fine and five years in prison per response for revealing protected information, a violation that the Department of Justice takes very seriously.



### Everybody Counts

The Census faces some challenges. In 2020, residents of the United States, except in very rural or remote areas, will be encouraged to take the Census online for the first time. We expect this to be a challenge for seniors, who are traditionally less likely to have Internet access or use the Internet. People living in poverty may also have difficulty responding to the Census. The Census typically has difficulty counting children under the age of 5, people who speak limited English, people working nontraditional hours, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and other more-marginalized populations. In response to these challenges, Orange County has set up a Complete Count Committee, working toward the goal of a full and accurate count of the County's population. Measures that the Committee has discussed that will be taken include: providing dedicated tablets and training staff at the County's libraries to assist patrons that may not have internet access; providing

information to vulnerable populations (seniors, parents of preschool children, caregivers of people with disabilities, etc.) about various ways they can take the Census and why it's important for them to do so; and assisting in recruiting efforts for local residents to be employed by the Census Bureau.

It is vital to Orange County that a full and accurate count is taken to ensure that we receive our fair share of funding and representation. It is necessary to our democracy that legislators and other political representatives should be apportioned correctly.

If anyone would like more information about the Census or would like to apply for a Census job, please visit [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov). Additional information about the Orange County Complete Count Committee or the County's other efforts to ensure a full and accurate count can be obtained from Megan Tennermann, AICP, Planner at [mtennermann@orangecountygov.com](mailto:mtennermann@orangecountygov.com).

### Common Situations Where Young Children are Not Counted

1. The child splits time between homes, or stays with another family or relative.
2. The child lives in a household with young parents or a young single mom.
3. The child is a newborn.
4. The child lives in a household that is large, multigenerational, or includes extended family.
5. The child lives in a household that rents or recently moved.
6. The child lives in a household where they are not supposed to be for one reason or another.
7. The child lives in a lower income household.
8. The child lives in a non-English or limited-English speaking household.
9. The child lives in a household of recent immigrants or foreign-born adults.

