

Data in the Time of Pandemic

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As the world is struggling in the grasp of COVID-19, accurate data about where and how people live is more important than ever. At this moment, hospitals and health departments from all over the world are looking at population, housing, and demographic data, trying to determine where the biggest risks exist and how to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus to vulnerable populations. State and local governments are using this information to determine where medical equipment is most needed, and how to get the equipment to its destination. Grocery stores and their supply chains are using their customers' demographic data to meet their needs. Now more than ever, accurate demographic data is vital.

Responding to the Census

The 2020 Census, now underway, is adapting to changing needs as well. The 2020 Census is the first Census conveniently designed to be taken remotely—all households with internet access in the United States are encouraged to go to my2020census.gov and respond online. While this was intended only to give people additional options and make it easier to respond, it has become vital due to the need for social distancing. Those who do not wish to respond online may fill out the paper form that will be mailed to their homes, or they may request a paper form in any of thirteen different languages (including English). Residents may also respond by phone, in any of those thirteen languages; the phone responses will be collected by a trained enumerator who can assist the resident if needed. To learn more about these options, please visit 2020census.gov.

As of March 31, 2020, Orange County's response rate to the Census was 31.0%, better than New York State's response rate at 29.6% but worse than the national response rate of 34.7%. Any home that has not completed their Census form before May 28th can expect up to 6 visits from an enumerator to help them complete their forms, although the household can still respond online or by phone up



until August 14th. Although the enumerators will be visiting, they will keep to a safe distance, use personal protective equipment, and invite people to respond to the Census on porches or sidewalks or in common areas to avoid entering and potentially contaminating people's homes. The best way to avoid a visit from an enumerator, however, is to fill out your form before May 28th. Later in the process, it may be possible for residents to go somewhere to fill out the Census; the public libraries of Orange County have declared their willingness to set aside computers and host events to assist people in filling out the Census, but these measures can only be implemented when the libraries reopen.

Why is it Important to Respond to the Census?

Even without a global pandemic, Census data is vital to everyday life. Logistical decisions depend on accurate population and demographic data—hospitals, schools, highways, nursing homes, and other important parts of everyday life use demographic data to determine where they need to locate new or expand existing facilities. School districts across the country are waiting on the results of the 2020 Census to inform their building operations and capital improvement plans for the next ten years, based on the number of children ages 0-9 recorded in their areas. Grocery stores rely on census information for the number of people in their service area and the ethnic makeup of their communities to determine what products to carry. Businesses of all kinds rely on basic population data to determine whether they can make a profit by providing a specific service.

Governments rely on Census data most of all, however. In Orange County, Census data is used for distribution of federal and state funds, and for determination of Federal, state and county legislative and municipal Board seats. The County also uses Census data to determine how much sales tax revenue is distributed to the municipalities within the county; the higher the population, the higher the distribution share. Please fill out your Census online, over the phone, or by mail in order to ensure that Orange County residents stay safe and healthy now and receive the resources they need to thrive in the next ten years.

