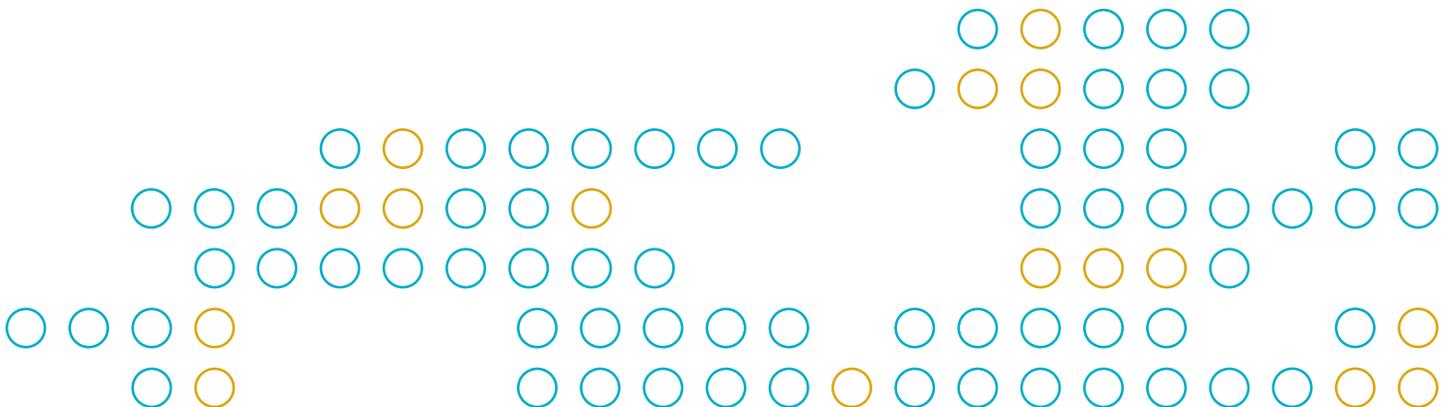


SUPPORTING THE CENSUS & AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY:

A Toolkit for Coalition-Building

February 2016



INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

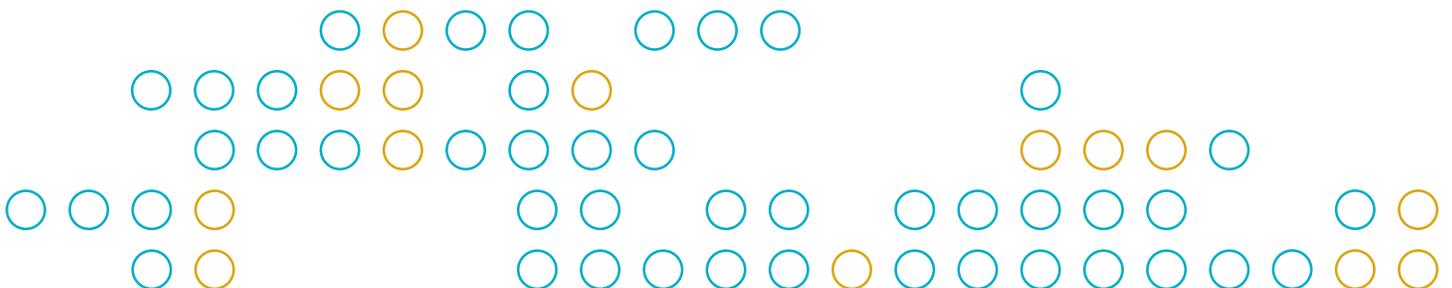
This Toolkit offers information, resources, and guidance for local stakeholders who want to create a coalition to help preserve a fair and accurate decennial census and comprehensive American Community Survey (ACS). Conceived and developed by The Census Project, the toolkit amplifies the work of MACS-Minnesotans for the American Community Survey, a local coalition formed in 2013. Our goal is to inspire local action across the country and offer a framework for building coalitions in support of the census and ACS. Constituent voices – especially those of local leaders and organizations – can play a significant role in educating Congress about the importance of census data for the health of the economy, the well-being of individuals and communities, and as the very basis of our democratic system of governance.

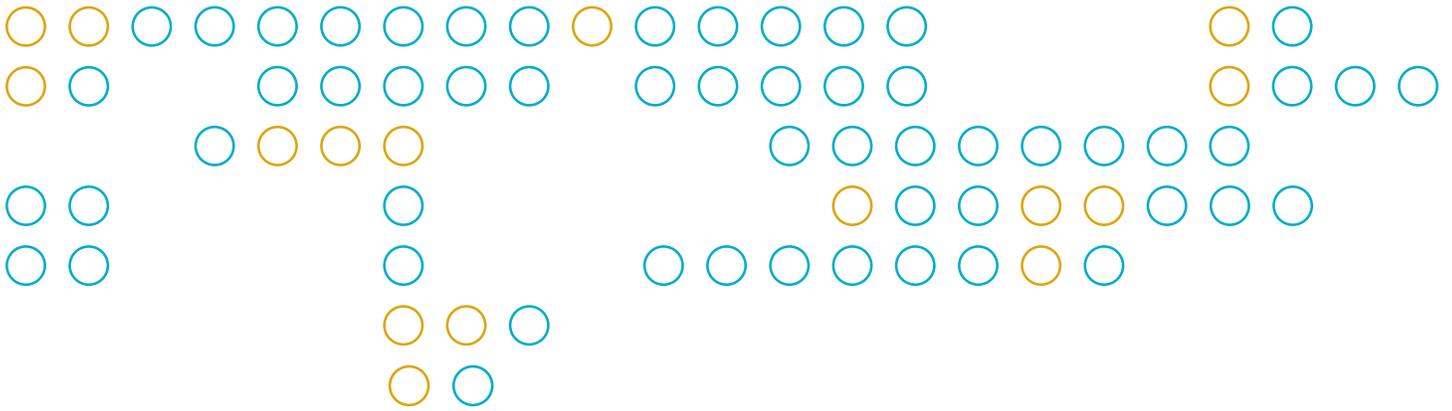
We offer special thanks to the Bauman Foundation for supporting this vital work, and to Joan Naymark, the primary author and Executive Director of Minnesotans for the American Community Survey, for developing this toolkit. Thanks also go to Minnesotans John Ziegenhagen, Marcia Avner, and Chris Henjum, and to Census Project Co-Directors Mary Jo Hoeksema, Terri Ann Lowenthal, and Phil Sparks, for their thoughtful insights and careful review of the toolkit.

MYTH

“If we’re not in DC, we can’t make a difference.” Most local organizations believe that all of the action occurs “inside the Beltway” in Washington, DC, and that only “insiders” can make things happen. In fact, the opposite is true. Local voices from the district (or state) have a great deal of credibility and influence and bring a note of home values to congressional offices. You may not know the protocol and all the players on the Washington scene, but your message carries authenticity and “connects the dots” between actions lawmakers take and the real consequences back home.

Remember, it takes only a handful of calls or letters to elevate a topic to an issue for a member of Congress. That is achievable in every district and every state in the country and is amplified and strengthened through your local organization.





SUPPORTING THE CENSUS & AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY:

A Toolkit for Coalition-Building

Executive Summary	3
1: The Importance of the 2020 Census and the ACS	4
2: Navigating Congress	7
3: Building an Effective Local Coalition	9
4: Managing a Local Coalition; Advancing the Work	13
5: Primary Goal: Educating Members of Congress	17
6: Alternative Models for Organizing	19
7: Conclusion	20
Resources	21
Checklists and Sample Letters	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is much at stake if Congress doesn't support the 2020 Census and the related American Community Survey (ACS). Inadequate, uncertain, and late annual funding, and proposals that threaten the availability of comprehensive, valid ACS data, could leave the nation, states, and local areas without accurate data for wise decision-making and resource allocation.

Here are some potential consequences:

2020 Census

- Inaccurate reapportionment and redistricting at the national, state, and local levels, with a disproportionate undercount of low-income households in dense urban and sparsely-populated rural areas, American Indian reservations, people of color, immigrants, and young children.
- A more expensive census, because funds arrive too late to research, test, and implement a modern, cost-effective design.
- Public, private and nonprofit sector decisions on strategy, investment, development, and operations that miss the mark due to inaccurate data on America's population and households.

American Community Survey

- A smaller sample size, reducing the reliability, timeliness, and availability of data — especially for small areas and smaller population groups.
- A voluntary survey, resulting in data with such low accuracy for small geographic areas and small population groups that much of the data would not be available for use.
- Misallocation of public, private, and nonprofit funding for education, roads and transit, housing, health care, rural and urban economic development, and a host of other vital services. At least \$450 billion a year in federal assistance is allocated to state and local governments based on census and ACS data.

Local voices can change this outcome. Members of Congress pay attention to constituent concerns. You have a unique opportunity to educate your elected representatives about the critical importance of ACS and decennial census data for the economic health and well-being of your local communities and families.

Start small. Get started. Follow the steps in this toolkit. Connect with partners who are already doing this work. You have an important role – only local voices can represent your state and area. One senator's office asked national stakeholders, "This all sounds good, but does anyone in my state care about census data?"

Action steps to take now

- Be informed – [sign on to The Census Project](#) distribution list to know what's happening and when to act.
- Write an email and request meetings with your Senators and Representatives. Your message is simple: consistent, accurate decennial census and ACS data are vital, unique, and essential to a strong local economy and the well-being of all residents in your state. Contact information for every U.S. Senator is available at <http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/>. Similar links for all members of the U.S. House of Representatives are available at <http://www.house.gov/representatives/>.
- Connect with others in your professional and local community – the more voices, the better. However, it takes only a few constituent letters to convince a member of Congress to focus attention on an issue.

SECTION 1

The Importance of the 2020 Census and the ACS

You likely know why the 2020 Census and related American Community Survey (ACS) are important for your organization. But you may not know how widely census data are used in every corner of economic, social, and civic life.

Are you:

- A civic or elected official who makes policy decisions or allocates resources based on accurate, consistent census data?
You know these data are essential for sound decisions.
- A research, data, or GIS analyst who works in the public, private, or nonprofit sector?
You depend on census data for small geographic areas or small population groups.
- A small business owner or corporate executive?
Census and ACS data guide your investment decisions and help ensure products and services that customers need.
- An economic development agency, or a Chamber of Commerce, working to attract jobs and talent to your community?
You need consistent, timely data to showcase your community or state.
- Someone who plans education, health, or housing outcomes by understanding trends in the community?
Without census and ACS data, you'd be flying blind.
- A city leader who needs to understand neighborhood change, or a county administrator in a rural area working to balance resources and the needs of the community?
There is no other source of small geographic area data for you to use.
- A leader of a non-profit organization, working to provide essential services for health care, education, job training, veterans, or housing?
Your team relies on detailed, publicly available data to target neighborhoods and people with the right programs and timing.

The common denominator for these decision-makers is reliance on census data – the ten-year population count and annual American Community Survey (the modern version of the census “long form”) – to shape policies. Throughout our nation’s history, we have depended on high-quality, objective census data in order to know where we’ve come from and where we are going.

Unfortunately, the census and ACS face significant challenges in Congress. Members of Congress tend to focus on district and state priorities, national security, a healthy economy, and constituent concerns. The census rarely rises to the top of the congressional priority list, except in the years ending in “0”. In fact, the 2020 Census seems very far off to most lawmakers, despite the fact that key design and operational decisions must be made by mid-decade.

Some lawmakers believe the government should not require its citizens to answer ACS questions and, even, some questions on the decennial census “short form”. Constraints on the overall federal budget and delays in passing spending bills have led to cuts in U.S. Census Bureau funding that make thorough 2020 Census planning difficult and threaten the viability of the ACS. Without sufficient and timely resources, the Census Bureau must delay, streamline, or cancel critical 2020 Census research, testing, and development activities, thus increasing the risk of technology and operational failures and cost overruns down the road. Budget cuts also could force the Bureau to reduce the ACS sample size, resulting in less reliable data for small areas and small population groups.

The U.S. Census. In our representative democracy, each congressional district has roughly the same number of people, and every state has two senators. Article I, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution requires a census every ten years, as directed by Congress. The number of congressional districts allocated to each state – called apportionment – is based on the census. States draw congressional and legislative district lines based on census counts. This most basic component of our democracy – an accurate count – has been in place for over 200 years, starting with the first census in 1790.

Census taking is expensive. Counting every person in the United States has become more costly as our population has grown larger and more diverse. The 2010 Census cost about \$13 billion, and Congress said it would not pay more for the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau is preparing to meet that cost challenge, while maintaining accuracy, by:

- Reengineering Address Canvassing through innovative methodologies for updating and maintaining the address list and spatial database throughout the decade.
- Optimizing Self-Response and reducing the number of households requiring follow-up. Tailored contact strategies, micro-targeted advertising, an extensive partnership program, and multiple response modes and devices, including an Internet response option, are important innovations.
- Utilizing Administrative Records and Third-Party Data (information people have already provided to the government or commercial entities) to reduce expensive in-person follow-up by improving the address list and the effectiveness of outreach and contact strategies, validating responses, and reducing field workload.
- Reengineering Field Operations through the use of technology to manage door-to-door visits more efficiently and effectively.

By using the ACS to test many operational and questionnaire innovations, the Census Bureau has made great strides toward a more cost-efficient census. However, more tests are necessary before it finalizes 2020 Census methods and operations.

Privacy and confidentiality are significant concerns. Public debates over NSA data gathering, and widely-reported data breaches at well-known companies and government agencies, have made Americans understandably more anxious about sharing personal information. Fortunately, most households (98 percent weighted response rate) respond to the ACS once they understand that their personal information is protected by strict laws and that the data benefit their community. Nevertheless, every congressional office is contacted by constituents who ask about the legitimacy of the ACS or their obligation to answer all census questions.

Some people are concerned about specific topics, such as race and ethnicity, income, commute time to work, and indoor plumbing, which they view as intrusive or inappropriate. However, Congress reviews and approves all questions on the census and ACS, which collect data that are required to implement federal laws and programs.

(Why we ask: <http://www.marketingresearch.org/article/why-does-census-ask-all-those-questions-american-community-survey-acs> and <http://www.census.gov/library/infographics/how-the-acs-works.html>)

Lawmakers need to hear from the thousands of organizations and individuals who depend on the data for daily decisions and operations.



HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

- The decennial census has collected a range of useful data beyond a basic population count since the first enumeration in 1790. Founding Father [James Madison](#) advocated for a census that collected a range of useful information to guide legislative decision-making.
- The ten-year census included a short form sent to all households, and a long form sent to a sample of households, from 1940 to 2000.
- To simplify the census and provide for more timely detailed data about American communities, the Census Bureau replaced the long form with the ongoing American Community Survey, launched nationwide in 2005. The ACS produces annual, updated estimates of key socio-economic characteristics for areas as small as census tracts and some block groups. [Ten Years of ACS Data](#)

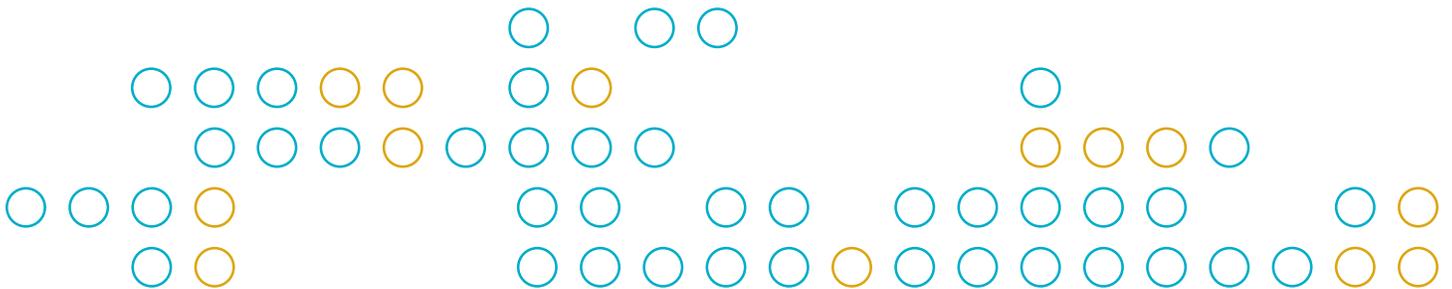


MANDATORY RESPONSE: THE CANADIAN LESSON

In 2010, the Canadian government abruptly ended the mandatory response requirement for the country's census long form, the equivalent of our ACS. Response rates plummeted, from 94 percent to 68 percent, and costs rose significantly. Further, because those who respond to voluntary surveys are different from those who do not respond, the results were not representative of the entire population, diminishing data reliability. Data for both small places and small population groups, in particular, were of very low quality and could not be published for many small towns and places. Even national-level data suffered; the household income statistics were widely viewed as invalid. Business associations and local governments called for reinstatement of mandatory response for the 2016 Canadian Census, and the loss of long form data even became an issue in the 2015 Canadian elections. The new government promptly reinstated the mandatory long form after taking office. Local voices made a difference in highlighting the importance of good data for sound decision-making.

(See also, page 22)

[Restoring the long-form census](#) Nov. 5, 2015



SECTION 2

Navigating Congress

The U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 2) gives Congress responsibility for the decennial census. Through the Census Act (Title 13, United States Code), Congress delegated authority for taking a census to the U.S. Department of Commerce; the Census Bureau is an agency of the Commerce Department. Congress also holds the purse strings and must allocate federal dollars to plan and execute the census and conduct the ACS. Therefore, congressional understanding of, and support for, census activities is essential.

There are two types of congressional committees that influence the Census Bureau's work.
(see *Resources*, page 21)

- The *authorizing committees* conduct oversight and consider legislation related to Census Bureau programs. The committees of jurisdiction are the [House Oversight and Government Reform Committee](#) and [Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee](#).
- The *appropriations committees* recommend funding levels for the Census Bureau each year, and might further guide the agency's activities with non-binding, but important, commentary in reports that accompany the annual appropriations bills. In both the [House](#) and the [Senate](#), a Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies, under each chamber's Committee on Appropriations, is responsible for Census Bureau funding.
- Because both chambers of Congress must pass all funding and legislative proposals before a bill can be presented to the President for signature, all Representatives and Senators — even if they do not sit on the Census Bureau's authorizing or appropriations committees — have an opportunity to express support for the census and ACS and to urge their colleagues to do the same.

The Census Bureau bears the primary responsibility for educating Congress about decennial census design, content, questions, costs, privacy, and operations. It regularly briefs House and Senate subcommittees with oversight and appropriations responsibilities for Census Bureau activities. Federal agencies are restricted from lobbying members of Congress — they can only testify at congressional hearings and educate lawmakers and their staff. That is why stakeholders can and must advocate on behalf of census data.

The Census Project (see [Census Project](#): page 21) has coordinated many stakeholder activities for the past 20 years in support of the census and ACS (previously the census long form), to educate lawmakers and staff on key policy and operational issues. Activities have included in-person meetings, letters and calls, testimony at committee hearings, and briefings.

Stakeholders from all sectors of economic and civic life have engaged in this important work:

- Business, trade and economic development groups, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, International Council of Shopping Centers, and National Association of Home Builders. [Business community letter](#)
- Professional organizations, such as the Association of Public Data Users, American Planning Association, Population Association of America, and American Statistical Association.
- Civil rights organizations and advocates for communities of color, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NAACP, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, National Urban League, and National Congress of American Indians. [The Leadership Conference letter](#)
- State, regional, county, city, and town governments. ["Big 7" letter](#)
- Academic and research institutions, such as the Center for Regional and Urban Affairs at the University of Minnesota, Population Reference Bureau, and the George Washington University Institute of Public Policy.
- Nonprofit and philanthropic communities such as The Brennan Center for Justice, Minnesota Compass, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, United Way, Catholic Charities, and many more.

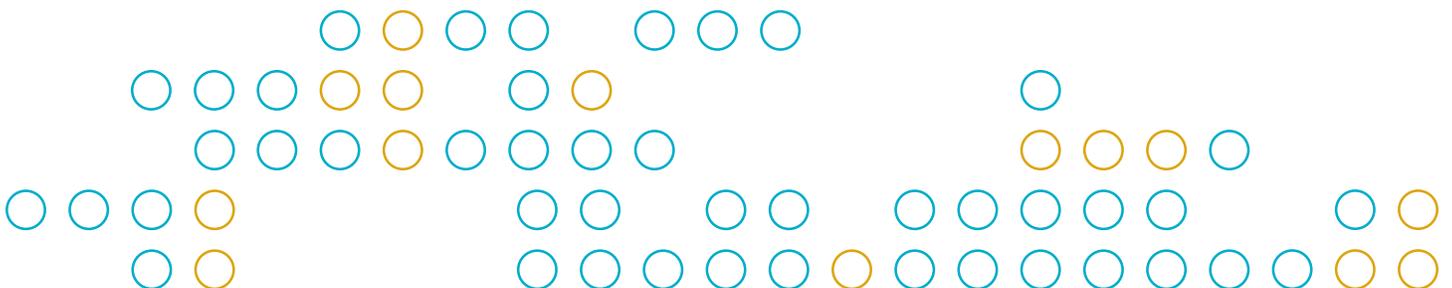
State and Local Voices: Because lawmakers listen to constituent concerns, state and local leaders can play an important role in educating members of Congress. By sharing insights and specific examples of how census and ACS data are used to inform positive outcomes, local voices help members of Congress understand the importance of census data for their district and state. The next section offers specific advice on how to build state- or locally-based coalitions in support of census data.



THE CENSUS PROJECT

(see *Resources, page 21*)

Since 1997, [the Census Project](#) (originally called the Census 2000 Initiative) has been organizing stakeholder support for an accurate, comprehensive census. Over 1,000 organizations from across the country receive Census Project updates, and several hundred organizations sign on to Census Project letters to Congress every year. The Census Project prepares and distributes [Fact Sheets](#), [Blog posts](#), and relevant news articles, as well as links to useful materials prepared by stakeholder organizations. The Census Project also helps organize stakeholder meetings with congressional offices and develops strategies for addressing policy challenges to the census and ACS.



SECTION 3

Building an Effective Local Coalition

This section will help you build an effective coalition of local and state census data stakeholders from the ground up. The effort need not be overwhelming; just remember — start small and grow. These steps and considerations will help you begin. (See *Resources, pages 25 and 26: Checklist: Building an Effective Local Coalition*)

ORGANIZE

Get up-to-speed and stay informed.

- Rely on national organizations to provide background information and timely updates for your coalition about census and ACS issues. You don't need to start from scratch.
- Sign up for The Census Project's updates and action alerts (see *Resources, page 21*).

Choose an individual or organization to lead and coordinate the coalition.

- The leader or lead organization should be a knowledgeable user of census data for policy, programs, or analysis.
- With just a few hours of time per week, a coalition can be ready to educate stakeholders and Congress about the importance of census and ACS data.

Create a steering committee, board of directors, or advisory board.

- Choose a core group of experienced data users or community leaders who represent as diverse a range of economic and social sectors as possible. Their professional networks and connections are important for growth and credibility. They will provide insight into different uses of census data by the private sector, government agencies, educators, faith communities, nonprofits, and foundations.
- Establish roles – who can speak on behalf of the coalition?
- Allocate tasks. Consider how best to use individuals with leadership, communications, and technical skills (e.g. social media, web page).

Choose a name for your coalition. The name should be simple, easy to remember, and include a reference to the census and/or ACS and the name of your state or local area.

- *Minnesotans for the American Community Survey (MACS)* chose a name that had a catchy acronym, but any short title that “brands” your effort will do.

Create a mission statement. Your coalition will need a clear statement of what you want to accomplish through your collective engagement. Identify your overarching purpose in joining forces.

- **Keep it short and simple.** Your mission statement shapes subsequent decisions about your goals, plans and priorities. You will return to it often. It can be as simple as, “Ensure that the 2020 Census and the ACS continue to provide complete data to meet the needs of a diverse set of users in [your state].”
- **Make it relevant to stakeholders and lawmakers.**
- **Describe why accurate, timely census and ACS data are important to your state and communities.**

Determine your legal status and potential sources of funding, if appropriate.

Will your coalition be run and managed by volunteers, or will you need some funding? A volunteer organization enables quick actions, but lacks resources.

- Some organizational options include being part of an existing organization, starting a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, or raising funds as a small private corporation. The choice you make about your structure will determine the kinds of activities in which you can engage.
- [A free publication by Bolder Advocacy](#) explains what kind of lobbying activities are permissible for nonprofit organizations. Private corporations may lobby. Being a project within an existing organization will require you to comply with the guidelines that govern that entity's activities. Some private or public grants also limit lobbying with that money. This will be stated in the grant contract. (see *Resources, page 22*)
- If you receive funding, you will need a fiscal agent to manage finances.



CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

Regardless of the structure of your organization, you may do unlimited education and advocacy to promote the census and ACS.

- Advocacy is the basic promotion of an idea. The only form of advocacy that has any limits is lobbying by nonprofits.
- Lobbying refers to a specific request to an elected official to vote in a particular way on a particular piece of legislation.
- You may be making the “ask” yourself (direct lobbying) or urging the public to make the “ask” (grassroots lobbying).

Know the rules and remember that education, advocacy, and [lobbying](#) are all responsible components of preserving the census and ACS.

OUTREACH

Start to build the coalition. Identify potential supporters and organizations.

- Reach out to your network(s), including colleagues and leaders, state-level professional organizations, and social media groups. (Use LinkedIn to find contact information.)
- Identify local organizations that depend on census data. Read business journals, local newspapers, and community and economic newsletters (references to census data are very common). Follow social media. All organizations using census data are potential supporters.
- Local organizations are not mini-versions of their national counterparts. Their focus is parochial, their mission is often tactical and service oriented, and resources are limited. Federal policy affecting census data may not seem relevant or in their comfort zone.
- Enlisting the involvement of high-level officials will improve the credibility and effectiveness of your coalition. Of course, all data users and decision-makers have an important role in a coalition.
- Draft an outreach letter to potential supporters, highlighting the importance of the census and ACS, describing challenges in Congress, and emphasizing the importance of local voices in educating lawmakers.
 - An e-introduction from a coalition member or leader in the community improves the likelihood of response. (See *Resources*, page 32, *Sample Outreach*)
 - Ask organizations and individuals to become a coalition “supporter” instead of a “member”. This is more effective, since “membership” implies fees and responsibilities.

Make the “ask” for organizations/individuals to become census data supporters.

- Being part of something bigger is essential. Stress the importance of your state’s unique story. Share the names of other coalition organizations and leaders – there is power in numbers.
- Describe how policy decisions made in Washington, DC could affect local decisions by restricting access to accurate, timely, reliable, and comprehensive data from the census and ACS.
- Ask how they use census data for their work, and why it is important.



THE MACS MODEL

(see *Resources*, page 21)

- [Minnesotans for the American Community Survey, or MACS](#), was formed in 2013 by a recent corporate retiree who had used census and ACS data throughout her career. After having served on the Census Advisory Committee for 15 years representing the private sector, she realized that just a handful of constituent inquiries can elevate the importance of an issue for members of Congress.
- MACS' Mission: To educate Minnesota's congressional delegation and the public about the importance of consistent, reliable ACS census data for a healthy economy and to improve the well-being of all Minnesotans.
- Starting with only 12 supporters in March 2013, MACS grew to 100 organizational and individual supporters across Minnesota by year-end. Two years later, MACS had 150 organizational and individual supporters.
- MACS developed relationships with the offices of all ten members of Minnesota's congressional delegation. By 2015, seven of the ten offices took positive steps to support ACS data, such as circulating "Dear Colleague" letters and hosting briefings, signing letters in support of full funding for the Census Bureau, speaking to MACS supporters, and casting votes in support of the 2020 Census and a comprehensive ACS.
- Visit the MACS website, follow them on Twitter or Facebook, and take a look at MACS Voices – local leaders voicing support for census data.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Twitter](#)



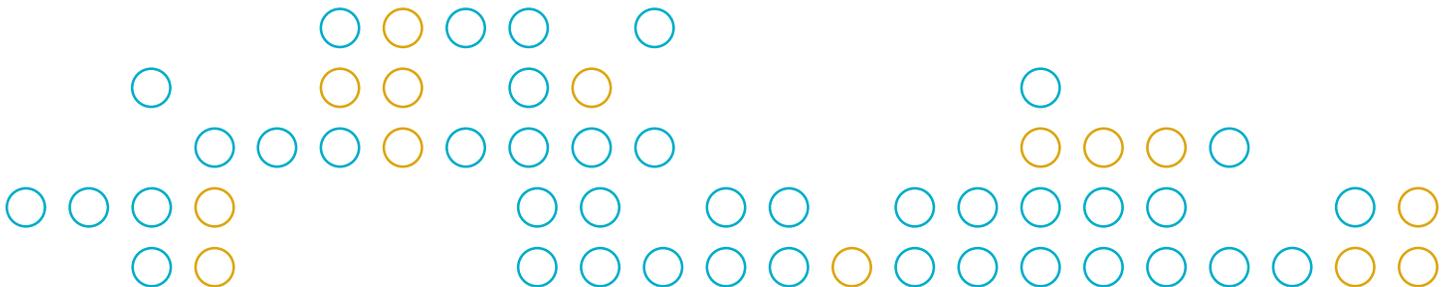


BUILDING BLOCKS FOR AN EFFECTIVE STATE-LEVEL COALITION

(see *Resources, page 27; Checklist*)

Each state will have a different set of priorities, issues, and types of organizations that will have the highest impact with its congressional delegation. Reach out to those who have a stake in the continuation of high quality census data. Consider a wide variety of stakeholders, such as agency and policy leaders who can speak about their mission; analysts and researchers who are closest to the data needs and applications; and organizational government liaisons. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Geography.** Consider major metro areas, regional hubs, and rural areas. Start with your primary population center(s), and then expand across the state.
- **Business and economic development.** These voices are influential with all members of Congress. Local councils of government, chambers of commerce, and economic development agencies use census data to attract businesses and jobs, remain competitive, and attract workers and talent to the area. Leverage these non-partisan voices to highlight economic health and growth.
- **Local units of government.** State government agencies use census data extensively, for education, economic development and employment, health, and transportation. City and county planning, social services, and civil rights offices are also highly dependent on census data.
- **NGOs — Nonprofits, foundations, and the faith community.** Local agencies and organizations use census data to identify community needs, request and fund programs, monitor trends, and assess program effectiveness. Consider United Way, LISC – Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Catholic Charities, housing organizations, health agencies, Kids Count, immigrant support agencies, veterans groups, and many others.
- **Civil rights organizations.** Include groups that focus on equal opportunity and access for underserved and vulnerable populations, including communities of color, persons with disabilities, the LGBT community, immigrants and refugees, low-wage workers, and children.
- **Newsmakers.** Identify local issues that are illuminated by census data, and local leaders and organizations that are prominent in those discussions.



SECTION 4

Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work

Now that you have created a structure for your coalition and have a few key players on board, it's time to begin engaging your congressional delegation, even as you continue to expand your base of materials and support. How will you know when to act, what issues to address, and how to work effectively with Congress? Connect with national stakeholders who understand and follow congressional activities closely. Follow their lead and be ready to amplify their messages with local voices. Section 4 provides tips to manage the coalition and advance the work. Section 5 addresses how to work with your congressional delegation. (See *Resources, page 30: Checklist: Managing A Coalition; Advancing the Work*)

Set Priorities

- **Make policy statements.** Voice ongoing support for census data as a critical resource for the public good, a strong democracy, and to promote well-being for all. Policy statements provide the reasons why this is important for all sectors of your state and community.
- **Encourage action by stakeholders.** Ask stakeholders to help educate members of Congress, either through their District or Washington offices, about the importance of data for their sector. Examples include economic development, education, job training, housing, and transportation.
- **Encourage action by lawmakers.** Educate members of Congress about the need for adequate funding for the census and ACS and the consequences for your state if data accuracy and availability declines. Ask for their support for key actions and votes.

Work with national partners

- Connect with The Census Project (policy updates; blog posts; sign-on letters; briefings; fact sheets). Read past communications to understand the rhythm of the legislative cycle on key issues related to the census and ACS, what the key issues are, and what's at stake.
- If your organization or professional network has a national office engaged in public policy, they may already be working in support of ACS and census data and be able to provide guidance. If they aren't, raise these issues with them, ask them to include support for the census and ACS as a top priority, and share why good data are important to your community and work. Note that your local network is ready to be an active partner on this work.

Create informational materials

- Draft simple, one-page fact sheets that explain your coalition's mission and membership, the importance of census and ACS data to your community and state, and key policy challenges. Create urgency to act. [MACS One Page Summary](#)
- Create a list of supporters — As your coalition grows, the list of supporters will generate attention from congressional offices, the media, and other potential supporters. [MACS Supporters](#)
- Local Voices — Tell the stories about supporters' use of census data, including specific examples. What are organizations doing with the data that improves the well-being of local communities? How do local governments use data to target neighborhood services and plan resource allocations? How do businesses and economic development agencies use data to operate successfully and improve the economy? [MACS Voices](#)
- Call to Action — What are the key issues, and what actions are needed? [MACS Issues](#)
- Provide links to current reports and articles highlighting the importance of census and ACS data at the national and local levels. A "Google Alert" for the "American Community Survey" can help identify demographic and economic news stories.

Good communication is essential

• Leverage technology

- Create a website. This gives your coalition a home base, credibility, and a platform to share information. [Use the MACS website as a model or guide.](#)
- Use social media, including Facebook and [Twitter](#), to engage supporters and highlight key issues.
- Create a Mailchimp or similar free software account to communicate quickly and easily with supporters via email, create newsletters, and distribute information.
- Monitor and update contacts for easy access and use (e.g supporters, prospects, congressional contacts, media, and leadership group). Decide if you will share your list with partners.

• Internal Communications

- Send regular updates via email to coalition members.
- Provide opportunities for supporters to sign coalition letters, send their own letters, attend meetings at congressional district offices, attend sponsored events, or “like” posts on your Facebook page.
- Meet and communicate regularly with the steering committee.
- Share important news with key stakeholders and newsmakers in the coalition.

• External Communications

- Post content on the web and Facebook pages; keep it fresh.
- Regularly reach out to new supporters and potential partners and allies.
- Reach out to congressional contacts. (see Section 5)



TECHNICAL TOOLS ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND ESTABLISH A PROFESSIONAL LOOK.

- **Google Drive and Calendar:** Storage of materials and event/activity schedule
- **Doodle:** Coordination of schedules
- **Mailchimp:** Professional looking newsletters and storage of contacts
- **Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn:** Social media accounts
- **ifttt.com:** A way to automate posting from one social media account to all others, or from a blog to social media accounts
- **Squarespace/Wix/Wordpress:** Easy to use, intuitive website creation options for those without a technical background
- **Canva.com:** A website to create professional graphics without a technical background

Continue to engage local supporters and partners

- Even though you already have some coalition stakeholders on board, growth is important to demonstrate the importance of census data in your state.
- Make it easy to act in support of census data. Lending an organization's name to the coalition and sign-on letters is easy. Writing letters or calling lawmakers, speaking out about the need for data, and attending meetings or events are higher levels of engagement that should be optional.
- Determine if some of your supporters and partner organizations have their own, established congressional office contacts that could be useful to the coalition effort.
- Some organizations may take action in support of census data but won't become a coalition supporter. Their voice of support is what matters, not the way in which they engage.
- Anticipate frequently asked questions. These could include:
 - Is census support a partisan issue? ([George Will Op-Ed in The Washington Post](#))
 - Are stakeholders in other states engaged in census support? (Minnesota has the only state-based coalition as of early 2016.)
 - How does the Census Bureau respond to privacy concerns? (see section 5, page 17, *Respondent Advocate*)
 - Do elected officials really try to undermine census data? (see *Canada's experience Section 1, page 6 and The Census Project, Section 2, page 8*)

Leverage the Steering Committee

- Tap the networks of steering committee members to expand your base of supporters.
- Identify examples of data use; stories are a powerful tool with members of Congress, the media, and potential supporters.
- Ask members to reach out to their networks and contacts, make e-introductions, highlight the coalition and challenges to census data in presentations or at conferences, or suggest opportunities to engage more stakeholders.
- Ask members to tweet notices about census and ACS data issues, or share on their Facebook or web pages.

Engage the media

The press is a big consumer of census and ACS data, but journalists may not be aware that these critical resources are in jeopardy.

- News articles rely on census data to describe current conditions and trends about the economy, education, housing, families, and neighborhoods.
- Many news outlets publish stories with a state and local focus when the Census Bureau releases census or ACS data. Watch for and share these articles.
- Some reporters specialize in demographic and economic stories. Watch for their bylines or broadcast stories, and reach out to them. Include media from all regions of your state, especially news sources that cover rural areas and small cities, for which ACS data are often the only source of comprehensive, current data.
- Leverage the relationships your steering committee and supporters already have with news and editorial staff of state and local newspapers and broadcast media. Ask coalition members to suggest articles or reports to those journalists, or to write op-eds themselves, when key policy issues affecting the census and ACS arise.
- Consider issuing press releases when Congress is taking key policy actions, to highlight the consequences for local stakeholders.



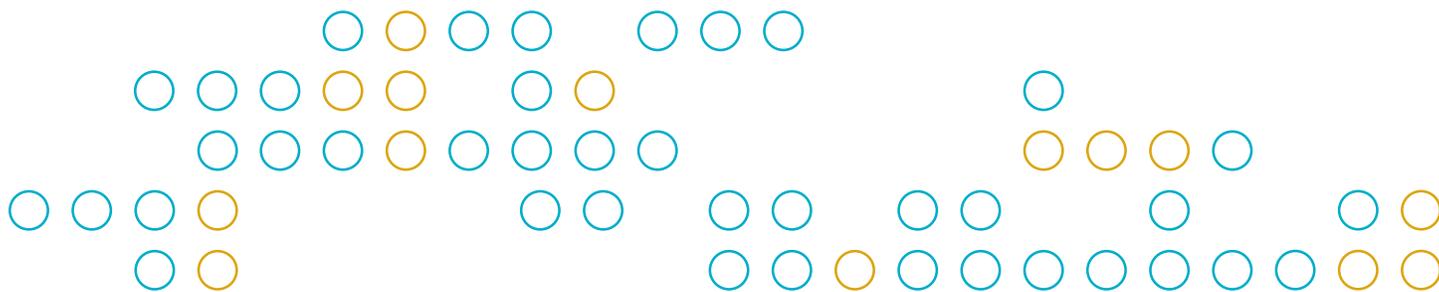
KNOWING WHEN TO ACT

Census stakeholders should be ready to communicate with their lawmakers at key moments in the legislative and appropriations process by following the lead of national census partners (see *The Census Project website: Stakeholder Tools*). There is a pattern to the federal legislative cycle during which key votes are made regarding Census Bureau programs. For a census data stakeholder coalition, action is concentrated in the Spring and Fall.

- **February:** President submits annual budget request for federal agencies and programs to Congress.
- **February – May:** House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees hold hearings to review budget requests for departments and agencies.
- **April – June:** Appropriations subcommittees (and subsequently, full committees) draft and vote on 12 annual funding bills (called a ‘mark-up’) covering federal government activities. The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies are responsible for Census Bureau funding.
- **June – September:** The House and Senate debate and vote on the annual appropriations bills. The federal fiscal year starts on October 1st.

In recent years (2012-2015), Congress has not completed appropriations bills on time or through normal legislative procedures, resorting instead to passing Continuing Resolutions to sustain funding at last year’s level. Another common strategy has been to roll all 12 separate appropriations bills into one comprehensive funding bill, called an omnibus appropriations bill. In addition, authorizing committee hearings and mark-ups, while infrequent, can occur at any time. For example, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held a hearing in March 2012 on Rep. Poe’s bill to make ACS response voluntary.

Stakeholders should also reach out to congressional offices when Congress is not in session at a more informal “coffee”, meeting, or event in the district. It is important to establish a working relationship with staff so the lawmaker will be ready to support census data and the ACS at key moments.



SECTION 5

Your Primary Goal: Educating Members of Congress

The primary purpose of a state-level census coalition is to educate Representatives and Senators from your state about the importance of census data for their state and district, to help them make informed decisions about adequate resources and reliable methods for data programs. Lawmakers appreciate hearing from constituents, yet surprisingly, they hear very little from constituents who depend on good data to drive sound decisions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. A broad-based coalition — representing a range of sectors, interests, and organizations that otherwise might not collaborate often — can influence a member of Congress to take action.

Identify lawmakers' interests that are illuminated by census data.

- Highlight issues of particular importance to each member of Congress, such as education, employment and jobs, veterans, transportation, housing, or rural economic development.
- You can access members' personal biographies on their websites. Their bios will give you good insight into each Member's legislative priorities and interests. (<http://www.house.gov/representatives/>) (<http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/>)
- News articles, lawmakers' official websites, and Members' committee assignments can help you identify those issues. (http://clerk.house.gov/committee_info) (http://www.senate.gov/committees/committees_home.htm)

Get to know congressional staff.

- Call the Washington, DC phone line for each member of your state's delegation; ask for the name and email address of the staff person who handles census issues.
- Email the Washington Office staff member and request an opportunity to speak by phone. (*See Resources page 32, Sample email*)
 - Introduce yourself and the coalition.
 - Explain how ACS and census data are vital tools for a robust economy and good quality of life in your state.
 - Talk about your own experience with the data.
 - If possible, determine if the Member is already a strong supporter of the Census Bureau or ACS, or if there is potential for the Member to become more engaged, given his or her legislative priorities or committee assignments.
 - Call the District Office and set up a phone call with a staff member to discuss the importance of an accurate census and comprehensive ACS to benefit residents of the district or state. District offices focus primarily on constituent concerns.
 - Going forward, send emails and relevant materials to your staff contacts in the Washington and District offices
 - Emailing your staff contacts is the most reliable and effective way to communicate. They will convey information to the member of Congress.

Arrange meetings with staff in the District and Washington offices, if convenient.

- Constituents often meet with staff members, but you can also request a meeting with the member of Congress.
- Meetings rarely last longer than 30 minutes, and are often only 15-20 minutes, especially in the Washington offices. Congressional offices are bustling; some meetings take place in hallways or in office waiting areas.
- Identify 3–5 coalition members representing relevant sectors, if possible, to participate in the meeting. It is easier to include local stakeholders in District Office meetings, but for Washington Office meetings, ask national stakeholders to join you.
 - Confirm the location, topic, and attendees with the staff person in advance.
 - Choose a spokesperson to deliver a short introduction and summary (no more than five minutes) for your group. Explain why you are there and what your primary concern/interest is. End the meeting with a specific “ask” of the lawmaker. For example, an “ask” could be a request to support a specific funding level for the Census Bureau and/or support for a fully funded, mandatory ACS.

- Provide a folder of materials for the staff member(s). This could include an agenda with participants' names, information about your coalition (one-pager), a list of your supporters/members, articles about local trends illuminated by census data, stakeholder letters, or data about ACS participation rates in your state. An information sheet about the Census Bureau Respondent Advocate is an important resource for congressional offices. (See *Resources, page 21, Congressional Resources*)
- Send a timely thank-you note to the member of Congress (formal letter) or staff member (email).
- Share information about the meeting with your coalition members. Highlight the meeting through social media (pictures are great), on your website, and in a newsletter. Visibility about coalition success is essential.

Keep staff members informed about legislative activities that affect the census and ACS.

- Send timely emails about the Census Bureau's annual appropriations bill. (See *page 16*)
- Provide real-time examples of district or state uses of census data, such as an economic development story that brings jobs to the local area. (Some staff members may click on a link more quickly than they will open an attached document.)
- Plan special events in the district that highlight applications of census and ACS data, and invite members of Congress. Focus on key issues of interest to that lawmaker, such as education, employment, or transportation. Partner with influential organizations in the district, such as chambers of commerce, foundations, or nonprofit organizations, to host an event.
- Always emphasize the relationship between census data and the well-being of communities in your state.

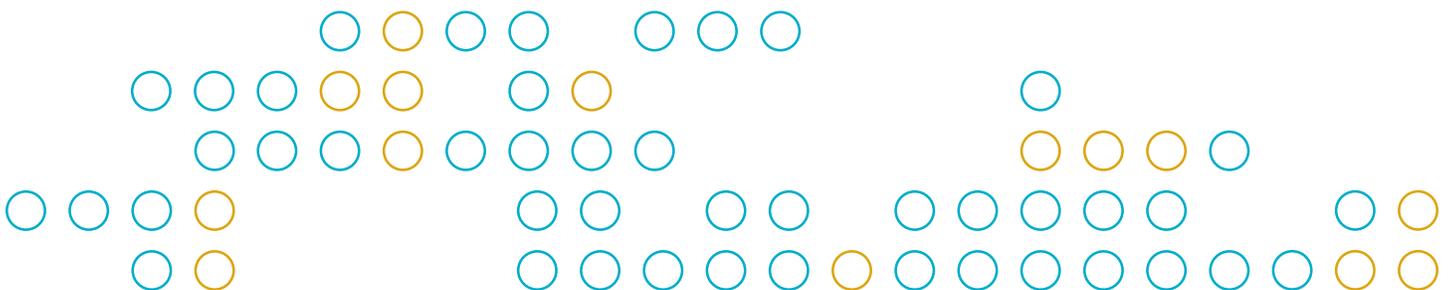


WHAT DO LAWMAKERS HEAR ABOUT THE ACS?

In every congressional district, about 8,000 households receive the ACS questionnaire each year. Final ACS weighted household response rates are nearly 98 percent, with initial response rates (Internet and mail) averaging about 60 percent (although initial response rates are much lower across the South), reflecting an outstanding level of cooperation. Only a handful of people in each district call their member of Congress every year, asking about the questionnaire or expressing concerns about privacy or the legitimacy of the survey. It is Congress's job to respond to constituent concerns. It is essential that census stakeholders add balance to the conversation by conveying their support for ACS and census data.

The Census Bureau's Respondent Advocate addresses concerns from respondents and members of Congress about confidentiality, privacy, content, and response burden. The Respondent Advocate is an important ally for census coalitions, informing and educating members of Congress and the public about the need for ACS and census data and sharing the Census Bureau's stellar privacy track record. [Get to know the Respondent Advocate.](#)

« The primary mission of the Respondent Advocate is to advocate for respondents in all matters relating to Census surveys and censuses. »



SECTION 6

Alternative Models for Organizing

Creating a statewide coalition may seem overwhelming, especially in a large state with many metro areas and potential stakeholders. If so, consider an alternative approach to start, perhaps centered on a single sector (e.g. public sector, nonprofits, economic development) or smaller geographic area, such as a single metropolitan area. This section proposes some alternative approaches to help you get started.

Sector-based Coalition

Create a coalition with partners and colleagues in your existing network and industry/sector. It could reflect business and economic development interests, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, or the public sector. Choose a name for your coalition that reflects its members' primary focus (for example, Illinois Nonprofits for Census Data). A strong, concerted sector voice can be influential.

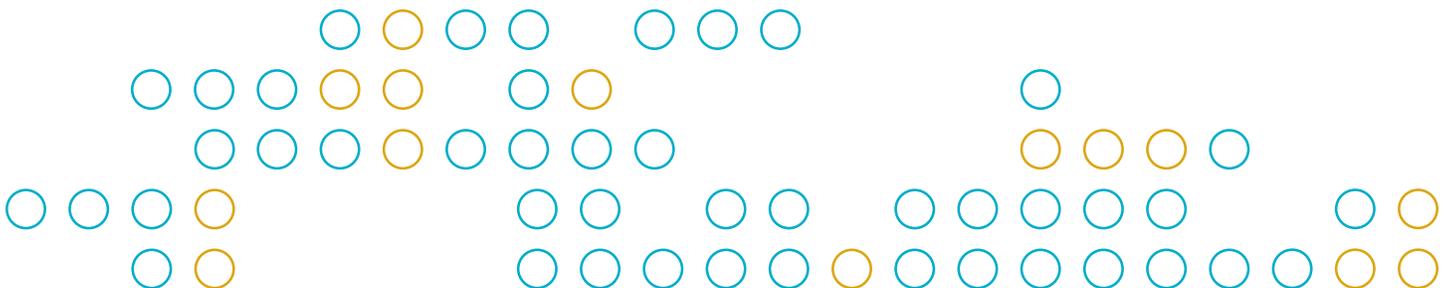
Targeting Congressional Committees

Representatives and Senators who serve on the appropriations and census oversight committees (see section 2, page 8) play especially important roles in developing policy and allocating funds for Census Bureau programs. Visit the committee websites to find out if anyone from your state's delegation serves on these committees. If so, you can activate local voices when these committees are considering relevant bills. However, all members of Congress vote on appropriations bills at some point, so every member of your delegation must be educated about the importance of census data for your state.

Rapid Response Strategy

An alternative to a coalition is a *rapid response team*, comprised of organizations similar to those you would embrace in a statewide coalition. While several of the key steps are still necessary (educate and enlist members; identify congressional staff; develop messages), a rapid response team would spring into action only at key moments — for example, when Congress is considering a harmful amendment or inadequate funding level.

- National partners will provide support, including draft language for letters and communications timetables.
- This model is more easily developed and maintained, and its activities are focused on the legislative season. A lead organization with census strategy know-how is the first and most critical step in the rapid response approach.



SECTION 7

Conclusion

Accurate data from the 2020 Census and the American Community Survey are at risk, due to inadequate or untimely funding from Congress. The ACS could become a voluntary survey that would put data for small geographic areas and small population groups in jeopardy.

Local voices can change this outcome.

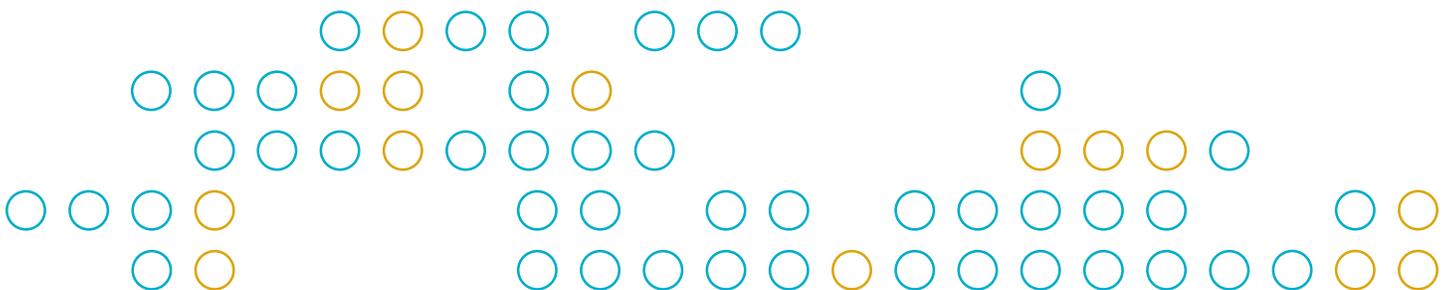
- Constituents matter to members of Congress. This is a unique opportunity for local stakeholders to speak up and educate their members of Congress. Without local organizations voicing support for census data, it is easy for members of Congress to ignore census issues.
- Local voices complement national voices. National census stakeholders have been voicing support for census data for years. Now is the time for local voices to be heard, amplifying national partner messages.

Get started — it's easy.

- Follow the steps in this toolkit to help you get started. Leverage partners who are already doing this work.
- Your state is important. Only local voices can represent your state, and a handful of calls from constituents can make a difference. As one Midwestern senator's staff asked a group of national stakeholders, "This all sounds good, but does anyone in my state care about the census?"

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.

The stakes are high for informed decision-making. The potential loss of consistent, accurate, small area census data requires immediate action from local areas and local voices.



RESOURCES

Organizational resources

The Census Project (see, also, Section 2, page 8 on the Census Project mission and history.)

- Website: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/>
- Blog posts: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/blog/>
- ACS: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/acs/>
- Letters: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/letters/>
- Fact Sheets: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/fact-sheets/>
- Stakeholder list: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/stakeholder-list/>
- Other Resources: <http://www.thecensusproject.org/other-resources/>

The Census Bureau and information about the census

Resources, information, blog, timeline, funding and planning for 2020 and ACS

- Census Bureau ACS web page
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>
- Census Bureau Respondent Advocate
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/are-you-in-a-survey/contact-us/respondent-advocate.html>
- <http://federalnewsradio.com/agency-oversight/2015/11/budget-timeline-derail-census-2020-redesign/>
- <http://www.census.gov/library/infographics/your-answer-your-future.html>
- <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/forms-and-instructions/2015-form.html>
- <http://www.census.gov/about/budget.html>
- <http://census.gov/library/infographics/invest-now.html>
- <http://directorsblog.blogs.census.gov/>

Minnesotans for the American Community Survey (MACS)

Mission, history, website, resources (See also section 3, page 11)

- Website: <http://minnesotansforacs.org/>
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MinnesotansForTheAmericanCommunitySurvey?fref=ts>
- MACS — About: http://minnesotansforacs.org/?page_id=20
- MACS Voices: http://minnesotansforacs.org/?page_id=405
- MACS Supporters: http://minnesotansforacs.org/?page_id=176
- MACS Issues: http://minnesotansforacs.org/?page_id=26
- MACS Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MNsforACS>

Canadian census resources: The Canadian Census Long Form

(Canadian Household Survey)

- the-tragedy-of-canadas-census: <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/02/the-tragedy-of-canadas-census/385846/>
- what-happened-when-canada-stopped-counting-its-numbers: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/2/what-happened-when-canada-stopped-counting-its-numbers.html>
- Data on Canada is now drying up: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/canada-voluntary-census_55ce2c59e4b055a6dab04238
- Damage from cancelled census as bad as feared, researchers say: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cities-footing-the-bill-for-data-gap-after-long-form-census-scrapped/article22695286/>
- Restoring the long-form census Nov 5 2015: <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1019529>

Congressional resources

Members of Congress and their committee assignments

- Senators: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm and http://www.senate.gov/general/committee_assignments/assignments.htm
- House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/>

Key Committees for the Census Bureau

- The authorizing committees are the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (<https://oversight.house.gov/>) and Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/>).
- The appropriations committees in both the House (<http://appropriations.house.gov/>) and the Senate (<http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/>) include a Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies, which funds the Census Bureau.

Advocacy Resources

- Advocacy for nonprofits: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy>
- COSSA Handbook – Advocacy (graphics used with permission): <http://www.cossa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/COSSA-Advocacy-Handbook.pdf>

CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

Chief of Staff
The most senior staff position in a Member's office, the chief of staff reports directly to the Member and is responsible for evaluation the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. He or she is also in charge of overall office operations, including assigning work and supervising the staff.

Legislative Director (LD)
The legislative director monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations to the member on the pros and cons of each issue.

Legislative Aide/Assistant (LA) or Legislative Correspondent (LC)
Legislative aides, assistants, and correspondents are assigned to work on a portfolio of issues related to the Member's responsibilities and interests. LAs and LCs assist with research and accompany the Member to meetings and hearings. They are also the staff members often assigned to meet with constituents and interest groups.

Press Secretary/Communications Director
The press secretary builds and maintains open and effective lines of communication between the Member, his/her constituency, and the general public. He or she works with both print and electronic media to promote the member's views or positions on specific issues.

Scheduler
The scheduler maintains the Member's calendar and is responsible for allocating the Member's time for hearings, meetings, staff responsibilities, and constituent requests.



CHECKLISTS AND SAMPLE LETTERS

- Checklist: Building an Effective Local Coalition
- Checklist: Growing Your Stakeholder Network
- Checklist: Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work
- Checklist: Educating and Engaging Lawmakers
- Sample Outreach Letter to Potential Stakeholders
- Sample Email Requesting a Meeting with a Congressional Office

Action Item

Who

By When

Status

Begin to build the coalition

- Identify potential local supporters (see checklist)
- Draft outreach letter (see sample letter)
- Begin outreach to potential supporters/leaders
 - Seek e-introductions from others
 - Send outreach emails
 - Answer questions, meet, or provide information
- Follow-up on non-response
- Create sharable list of supporters, with job title & organization

Create website and social media “home base”

- Website –
 - Add initial content and links
 - Create supporter sign-on page
 - Create newsletter sign-up page
- Create Facebook page; add content
- Create Twitter account
- Manage content

Communication

- Create Mailchimp or similar account
- Input supporter names and contact info; maintain list

Create informational materials

- Draft (or modify existing) one-page fact sheets
 - Coalition’s mission and membership
 - The importance of census and ACS data
 - Key policy and funding challenges in Congress
 - Stories of local benefits/uses of data
- Post “Call to Action”
- Provide links to current reports and articles
- Draft and send regular updates

CHECKLIST: Growing Your Stakeholder Network

Consider all sectors and organizations that are important to your state and local area(s). Which groups or individuals are important to get your coalition off the ground, and which could be added later? Aim for a mix of leaders (executive directors/directors, CEO/presidents) and data users (analysts, researchers, GIS specialists, policy, subject matter experts). Who is in the news? Who is part of your (board's) network? Continue to build your list over time.

Organization

Individual/Role

Geography

- Metro area(s)
- Regions
- Counties
- Cities
- Other

Business & Economic Development (state, metro, region, city)

- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Agencies
- Business/Downtown Councils
- Regional Councils of Government
- Business trade groups (shopping centers, homebuilders, general contractors, restaurant associations, manufacturers, transportation, business economists, market research, etc.)
- Market research firms
- C2ER (Council for Community and Economic Research) members
- Businesses in retail, real estate, development, hospitality, consumer products
- Other

Research and data organizations

- Consulting groups
- Research groups
- GIS/mapping groups
- Data organizations
- Big Data, Open Data, E-data organizations and coalitions
- Data Analytics and data science organizations
- Meet-up interest groups (GIS, analytics, open data)
- ACS User Groups
- APDU members
- Community Indicator Consortium members
- Other

Local units of government

(consider departments of planning, civil rights, transportation, forecasting, population centers, assessors, economic development, community development, housing, health, employment, jobs)

- State agencies
- Regional councils of government
- Counties
- Cities
- Towns/townships
- Tribal governments
- Other

Organization

Individual/Role

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)

- Nonprofits (United Way, LISC, Catholic Charities, YMCA, Kids Count, etc.)
- Foundations (community, private, public, corporate/business, etc.)
- Faith community (council of churches, interfaith councils, service coalitions, etc.)
- Veterans groups
- Other

Civil and Human Rights

- State/local chapters of national civil rights organizations (e.g NAACP)
- Communities of color (e.g., African American; Latino; Asian Pacific American; American Indian and Alaska Native)
- Senior citizens
- Children and families
- Labor unions
- Immigrants, ethnic communities, and refugees
- Persons with disabilities
- LGBT community
- Women’s organizations
- Anti-poverty organizations

Academia and Think Tanks

- Large and regional public universities, colleges, and community colleges
- Private colleges: Not-for-profit
- Private colleges: For-profit
- Trade schools
- K-12 schools
- Research organizations: University
- Research organizations/think tanks
- Other

Newsmakers in your state/local area

- Policy and business leaders dependent on census data
- State demographer or economist
- Elected officials
- Other

Media

- Newspapers
- Trade journals
- Broadcast media
- Online-only media (e.g MINNPOST)
- Business journals and press

Organization

Individual/Role

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Individual/Role</u>

CHECKLIST: Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work

Who

Status

Set Priorities

- Write policy statements/post on website
- Encourage actions by stakeholders
- Encourage actions by lawmakers

Work with national partners

- Monitor and follow The Census Project; prepare for action steps
- Inform The Census Project of your new coalition
- Form partnerships with national organizations and professional networks

Continue to engage local supporters and partners

- Continue outreach to potential supporters; develop contact strategies
- Fill gaps in representation (geographic, sectors, etc.)
- Reach out to networks of steering committee members
- Ask for examples of data uses
- Identify and attend conference and event opportunities (speaking, hand-outs, posters)
- Tweet notices about ACS/census and coalition actions

Engage the media

- Identify reporters who specialize in demographic and economic stories
- Identify reporters known to coalition leaders
- Suggest articles or op-eds
- Issue press releases when appropriate

Sample Outreach Letter to Potential Supporters

Census Coalition

Outreach Message (*customized message*)

To: **[email address of potential supporter]**

Subject: **Support Essential Census Data - Add Your Voice**

[Coalition name] is a [new] nonpolitical coalition in **[state/geographic area/sector]**. **[Coalition name]** values consistent, timely, and accurate census data to drive wise decisions, policy, investment, and program evaluation, and to improve the well-being of local communities. Your organization/sector relies on the American Community Survey (ACS) and decennial census data to **[list benefits and uses; refer to headline or organizational report, if available]**

Why is **[coalition name]** necessary?

Recently, some members of Congress have questioned the need for ACS data and challenged adequate funding for the census. Legislation has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate to make the ACS a voluntary survey. If enacted, a voluntary ACS would result in lower response rates, higher costs, and much lower quality data. In fact, the Census Bureau may not release data for smaller geographic areas or for small population groups due to concerns about data quality. There have also been calls to eliminate or de-fund the survey altogether. That would have a large, negative impact on economic growth, community vitality, and families in our state. Furthermore, the quality of 2020 Census data are at risk if the Census Bureau does not receive sufficient and timely funding to plan and execute a modern census. This could result in higher costs and a less accurate count, especially for small places and hard-to-count populations.

What data are at risk?

Key census statistics about our region and communities are available only from the ACS: commuting, labor force attributes, household income, educational attainment, housing characteristics, language and ancestry, households and families, disability status, health insurance, and much more. These statistics are available annually for small geographic areas and small population groups only from the American Community Survey.

The mission of **[coalition name]** is to [mission statement]. **[Coalition name]** has developed relationships with the [count/percent] of [state name]'s congressional delegation resulting in a positive impact on their views about the critical importance of the data. **Will you join us by becoming a [coalition name] supporter?** You can make a difference. Your voice matters. Simply add your name to the list by **[replying to this email or signing up online with this link]**, and support continued access to accurate, comprehensive ACS and decennial census data.

Regards,

Name

title/coalition name

Website link

Sample Email Requesting a Meeting with a Congressional Office

To (congressional staff member email address)

Subject: Request (constituent) meeting in [**District or DC office**]: Coalition supporting census data

Hello, Mr./Ms. [**name**]

I am the Executive Director for [**coalition name**] [**based in xxxx**]. We are a local nonpartisan coalition of organizations, leaders, and individuals who believe in evidence based policy, investment, and resource allocation. American Community Survey and decennial census data help us drive sound decisions to improve the economy and well-being of [**state name**] communities and residents.

Senator/Representative [insert name**]’s support for accurate, comprehensive census data is very important to [**insert state name**].**

However, these critical data face challenges in Congress.

- The 2020 Decennial Census is one of our nation’s most important activities, yielding information required by the U.S. Constitution for apportionment of the House of Representatives. Yet the 2020 Census is at risk. Without adequate and timely funding to design census methods that leverage modern technology, the 2020 Census could cost taxpayers upwards of \$5 billion dollars more than is necessary and result in lower quality information about our nation’s population.
- The American Community Survey (ACS, formerly the census long form) is at risk of elimination or much lower data quality through defunding or by the survey becoming voluntary. Over \$400 billion in federal funds are allocated based on ACS data each year.

I/we will be in [**district city or Washington D.C.**] on [**date**]. Are you available to meet? I’d like to share our perspective and tell you more about these current challenges. I’m available at [**time options**].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

[**name**]

Executive Director, [**coalition name**]

[**coalition website link**]

Phone number

[**list of coalition supporters**]



