CENSUS 2020
MICHIGAN NONPROFITS COUNT

m.n.a
Michigan Nonprofit Association
EVERYONE COUNTS, EVERYONE WINS
EVERYONE COUNTS, EVERYONE WINS
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Dear Friends,

The 2020 census was more than a population count – it was an opportunity to make a difference and to shape Michigan’s future. We thank you for investing your energy, time, and commitment in the Census 2020 Michigan Nonprofits Count Campaign to ensure a fair and accurate census for all communities – particularly Michigan’s historically undercounted populations.

Thanks to your hard work, Michigan finished eighth in the U.S. in self-response rate. On June 17, 2020, we became the first state in the nation to have exceeded its 2010 self-response rate. We also ranked third-best in the nation for the largest gain in statewide response from the 2010 census, rising from 67.7% to 71.3%. Most importantly at the local level, in every census tract where the campaign was active, the self-response rate averaged 7% higher than in census tracts where the campaign was not active.

While getting the census count has never been an easy task, when we started this journey in 2017 we couldn’t have predicted what was to come in 2020. We faced multiple challenges, including confusion over the late addition of a citizenship question, a global pandemic that wreaked havoc with our get-out-the-count plans, and shifting deadlines.

The public health crisis forced us to be more flexible and creative, and we rose to that challenge. Nonprofits were able to mobilize and spread awareness about the importance of filling out the census.

The success we had with the decennial census in Michigan could not have happened without our broad, bipartisan, multiracial coalition, which included hundreds of nonprofits working with government and for-profit organizations.

We thank you again for your heart and grit, and we look forward to partnering with you on future civic engagement efforts to ensure a fair and equitable Michigan where everyone counts and every voice is heard.

DONNA MURRAY-BROWN, CO-CHAIR, PRESIDENT, AND CEO
MICHIGAN NONPROFIT ASSOCIATION

HASSAN JABER, CO-CHAIR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ACCESS

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The U.S. Constitution mandates that a census be taken every 10 years to count all people—citizens and noncitizens—living in the United States. An accurate count is required by law and serves as the basis for determining political representation. The census count also plays an equally vital role in other areas of public life throughout Michigan. Private-sector investment and hiring decisions are based on census data that tracks population trends and behaviors, and in every region of the state billions of dollars are apportioned for public infrastructure and program funding according to census results.

With representation and resources hanging in the balance, the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) understood that the 2020 census was a singular opportunity to engage nonprofits and communities in civic participation and advance anti-racism and diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice policies (DEIJ) to create a culture of empowerment for communities that have been historically marginalized and undervalued.

“The 2020 census became our opportunity to activate in a big way with a critically important theme,” Murray-Brown said. “It was an urgent theme around civic and community engagement and an urgent theme around diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

This report is intended as a reference point for our coalition’s experience—a written record of civic engagement challenges, strategies, activities, and best practices—because while much will change in the next 10 years, it is likely that the 2030 census will still be important to people and communities in Michigan, and the lessons learned during the Census 2020 Michigan Nonprofits Count Campaign (also interchangeably referred to as the Be Counted 2020 Campaign) will inform the future efforts of funders, elected officials, and community organizations as we continue working to improve the lives of the people we serve.
“The 2020 census became our opportunity to activate in a big way with a critically important theme,” Murray-Brown said. “It was an urgent theme around civic and community engagement and an urgent theme around diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

DONNA MURRAY-BROWN - Michigan Nonprofit Association
Historically, the census has disproportionately missed people of color, immigrants and their families, young children, people who live in poverty, and people experiencing homelessness. This has led to inequality in political power, government funding, and private-sector investment for these communities.

In the 2010 census Michigan was in danger of undercounting many vulnerable populations, putting the state at risk of losing federal funding that was vital to communities across the state. With support from the philanthropic community, MNA led a statewide effort to mobilize and engage nonprofits across the state to increase the 2010 census count, particularly in hard-to-count communities. This effort resulted in Michigan being one of only a handful of states that exceeded census-form mail-in rates from 2000.

In 2020 it was generally agreed that Michigan was likely to experience a significant undercount in both rural and urban communities. Demographics were shifting toward an increasingly older, more diverse, lower-income, and ultimately more vulnerable population with limited access to technology and greater discomfort engaging with government. As in 2010, the need for communication, outreach, coordination, and organization to help boost Michigan’s chances of getting an accurate and complete census count was evident.
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While the 2020 campaign did draw on lessons learned from the 2010 campaign, we also encountered unique obstacles in the effort to reach and mobilize historically undercounted populations using new technology in a pandemic. The challenges included:

- Underfunding of the 2020 census, resulting in the Government Accountability Office placing the census on its high-risk list because of concern that the lack of funding would hinder the U.S. Census Bureau’s ability to complete the census on time and accurately. This lack of funding also resulted in cancellation of two of the three planned dress rehearsals for the 2020 census and resulted in fewer local Census Bureau offices and staff.

- The 2020 decennial census was unique because individuals were being encouraged to complete the census online and census takers were to be equipped with internet-connected devices to simplify the process, making the dress rehearsals crucial for testing the new, internet-first data-collection approach.

- Public trust in the government was near historic lows. According to the Pew Research Center, only 20% of Americans said they could trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (4%) or “most of the time” (16%). The inherent difficulty of getting people to respond to the census was compounded when they were being asked to participate by an entity they did not trust.

- The U.S. Census Bureau was experiencing a leadership vacuum with the resignation of the director in May 2017. As stated in an opinion piece published in the Washington Post that was authored by Republican and Democratic past directors of the Census Bureau, “The 2020 census faces unprecedented challenges in collecting data, including fear of government authorities in immigrant communities, cyber security threats (real or perceived) and uneven access to reliable internet service, which could disadvantage rural, low-income and older households. The nation needs a Census Bureau director with the capabilities to navigate these minefields credibly and deliberately.”

- COVID-19 public-health imperatives fundamentally altered the outreach and data-collection parameters at a late stage of the campaign planning process. The campaign had anticipated a broad range of person-to-person interactions as core activities. Campaign partners had to cancel hundreds of planned, in-person promotional and information-sharing events and activities. Additionally, the already-developed messaging approach had to be significantly reconfigured to further emphasize digital engagement and outreach that incorporated appropriate social distancing. Finally, the campaign still needed to reach people who were geographically dispersed, without internet access, and those facing literacy, language, or cultural barriers.
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Historically, the census has missed disproportionate numbers of racial minorities, immigrants, young children, and those living in poverty ("hard-to-count populations"), leading to inequality in political power, government funding, and private-sector investment for these communities.

Every year, billions of dollars in federal taxes paid by citizens are allocated to states based on census counts. In Michigan, it is estimated that annual per-capita funding based on census counts is between $1,800 and $5,000 per person in different regions of the state. Over the course of a decade, Michigan could lose between $18,000 and $50,000 for every Michigan resident who is not counted in the decennial census. Even a 1% undercount can cost billions of dollars, with severe impacts on a wide spectrum of programs in urban and rural areas, including:

- Title I and special education.
- Foster care and child care.
- Section 8 housing vouchers.
- K-12 education.
- Head Start/Early Start.
- Infrastructure funding for roads, highways, and bridges in every Michigan county.
The census has significant implications for Michigan representation in the U.S. Congress and the White House as well. Congressional seats are apportioned based on population, and accurate census counts can determine the size of Michigan’s delegation in the House of Representatives. Also, since every state is allocated a number of electoral votes for president and vice president equal to the number of senators and representatives in its U.S. Congressional delegation, a census undercount that leads to a smaller congressional delegation can impact Michigan’s influence at the highest executive level of the federal government.

“Michigan was still struggling with economic depression, and we were challenged with resources and how to rebuild not only the city of Detroit, but the state’s entire infrastructure for rural issues, health care, and jobs. So that really made the challenge of a complete 2020 count much more urgent to me and to many others.”

HASSAN JABER - ACCESS
Accurate census data is also critical for long-term decision-making in the private and nonprofit sectors. Businesses plan expansion and job creation based on census data about population growth, location, and demography. The census helps community leaders decide where to build new schools or offer better support services for seniors and single parents. Health-care networks use census results to decide where more health clinics and hospitals are needed or where prenatal or preventative care services are essential.

Census data paints a valuable portrait of communities, allowing foundations and nonprofits to anticipate population movement and plan for shifts instead of reacting to them. Nonprofits rely on census data for research and to help build their cases for grants to supply critical needs in communities, such as food, unemployment assistance, shelter, and clothing — especially when people are suffering from economic decline or a public-health crisis such as COVID-19. If people are not counted in the census, critical funding can go elsewhere, instead of into communities that need it most. When those shortfalls occur, people are likely to turn to nonprofits to bridge the gaps. The effects of an undercount can impact people, communities, and economies for decades, whereas an accurate census offers deep insights to help nonprofits, governments, businesses and other entities anticipate changes in the future.
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**WHAT’S AT STAKE?**

**LARGEST FEDERAL SOURCES THAT USE CENSUS DATA FOR DISTRIBUTION**

- Medicare/Medicaid/Health Centers: 58%
- SNAP/WIC/School Lunch: 20%
- Education (Title I, IDEA, Headstart): 8%
- Infrastructure (Highways, Roads, Bridges): 7%
- Housing (Section 8): 4%
- Children (Child care, S-CHIP, Foster Care): 2%
- Other: 1%

Nonprofits are best equipped to mobilize historically undercounted communities because they:

Provide services in communities most at risk of being undercounted in urban and rural areas.

Maintain everyday contact and have trusting relationships with the communities they serve.

Successfully manage cultural sensitivities and language needs within their communities.

Are driven by social missions striving to ensure their communities have access to the funds, services, representation, and physical and social infrastructure affected by the census count.

Are keenly aware of the negative impact an undercount will have on their communities. They often fill gaps and provide additional support for financial shortfalls caused by census undercounts.
Few, if any, sectors of society know communities and neighborhoods as well as nonprofits. They are uniquely qualified to mobilize the state’s historically undercounted populations, and they understand the real-life impacts on those communities of inequality in political power, lack of government funding, and inadequate private-sector investment.

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3. Successfully manage cultural sensitivities and language needs within their communities.
4. Are driven by social missions striving to ensure their communities have access to the funds, services, representation, and physical and social infrastructure affected by the census count.
5. Are keenly aware of the negative impact an undercount will have on their communities. They often fill gaps and provide additional support for financial shortfalls caused by census undercounts.
Early in the process of engaging nonprofits in the 2020 census, Debbie McKeon, former vice president and chief operating officer for the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), received training from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation focused on how to educate other foundation and nonprofit leaders about the upcoming census.

With support from a $20,000 CMF grant, McKeon led education efforts with MNA and developed the Census Hub-model that she suggested to MNA.

MNA subsequently received seed funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in the form of a $600,000 grant to help the organization with its goal of reaching historically undercounted communities.

It was important to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation that the campaign leadership structure being developed by MNA and the Council of Michigan Foundations included a list of community leaders spanning the state who knew, understood, and were actively engaged with communities of color and had social justice advocacy experience.
Regina Bell, former program officer for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, suggested stakeholders who might be best suited to help lead the census project in regions around the state. Those regions ultimately would be divided into 13 Regional Census Hubs.

McKeon’s earlier training with the MacArthur Foundation, the CMF investment, and the significant commitment of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation all served to galvanize financial support from other foundations.

Between January 2018 and April 2019, McKeon hosted conversations about the campaign with representatives from numerous corporate foundations and philanthropic organizations, showing how the Census 2020 Michigan Nonprofits Count Campaign fit their funding criteria and initiative goals. McKeon’s energy and effort helped the campaign raise about $4 million.

While some funders had grant-making criteria requiring them to support statewide initiatives, others sought to bolster initiatives impacting specific regions of the state. Additionally, some corporate funders insisted they could only support hyperlocal endeavors. Because of the campaign’s unique and all-encompassing framework, McKeon was able to demonstrate that the campaign fit into all those categories.

“We had to make sure the hubs were mindful of the social justice implications,” said REGINA BELL - W.K Kellogg Foundation.
During this formative stage of the Be Counted 2020 effort, campaign leaders recognized that the campaign also needed state support, so they lobbied state legislators for funding to support the work. That initial effort resulted in the Michigan Legislature allocating $1 million in appropriations for 2018.

It was a good start, but Hassan Jaber, president and CEO of ACCESS, co-chair of the Michigan Nonprofits Count Campaign, and co-chair of the Michigan Complete Count Committee, realized the initial state funding wasn’t going to be enough to surpass the 2010 census results.

With that sense of urgency, Jaber, also a former member of the Census National Advisory Committee, asked MNA External Affairs Officer and MNCC Manager Joan Gustafson to return to the Michigan legislators a second time to request additional funding to improve efforts to reach historically undercounted communities around the state.

Gustafson reminded legislators that 42% of Michigan’s budget was made up of federal funding and that for every person not counted in the census, Michigan stood to lose thousands of dollars per person per year for 10 years.

The effort was successful, and in June 2019 the Michigan Legislature allocated an additional $5 million in appropriations funding for the Census 2020 Michigan Nonprofits Count Campaign, to ensure a complete count of all Michigan residents.
We were concerned that historically undercounted communities, especially children, immigrants, and African Americans were the challenge – and had been the challenge. Detroit didn’t do too well in the 2010 census, and other urban centers in the state also had high concentrations of undercounted people. We knew we needed to do a much better job of reaching out to those communities.”

JOAN GUSTAFSON - Michigan Nonprofit Association
MNA, with support from the Council of Michigan Foundations, created a model for outreach to historically undercounted communities. MNA provided training and technical assistance to the Regional Census Hubs, which trained local nonprofit organizations. An evaluation process and dashboard were developed for the hubs and mini-grant recipients to ensure accountability.

The MNCC also helped hubs identify traditionally undercounted communities by hosting webinars led by the state demographer, who taught nonprofits how to use data tools such as the Response Outreach Area Mapper (ROAM) and the City University of New York’s Hard-to-Count Interactive Database.

The hubs received regular updates from MNA at hub site retreats and received training and webinars on how to engage local governments to prepare them for the 2020 census.

Local advisory committees also contributed to the success of most hub sites. Since at least 62% of committee members were from traditionally undercounted communities, they helped bring a fresh perspective to reach people who likely would have been overlooked.

In Battle Creek, for example, the Calhoun County Census Hub’s advisory committee included organizations representing the LGBTQ+, Burmese, and Latinx communities. The Burma Center translated census information into the many dialects spoken by city residents, and its leaders committed to making presentations at churches where they worshipped.

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MNA partnered with Mort Crim Communications (MCCI Inc.) to develop its Be Counted Michigan Campaign strategic communications plan. The Detroit-based integrated marketing agency designed the campaign’s logo, coordinated media relations, developed the collateral for regional hubs and nonprofit organizations, and launched the BeCountedMI2020.com website.

Based on input from community nonprofits and New Michigan Media summits (NMM is a network of ethnic and minority media outlets and publications), the “Everyone Counts. Everyone Wins!” consumer-based ad campaign, which included the MiVoiceCounts.org website, was launched in October 2019.

The first phase of the multimedia campaign focused on traditionally undercounted populations and was designed to reinforce and overlay the Get Out The Count effort of the Regional Census Hubs that was already underway. It boosted awareness about the 2020 census and helped people living in historically undercounted communities grasp the importance of full participation in the census count, reminding them that they could complete the census online.

Planning and activities began more than a year before the campaign’s official launch, when the campaign for the 2020 census was discussed in May 2018 at the Mackinac Policy Conference, the annual gathering of more than 1,500 business, government, and civic leaders held on Mackinac Island.

“A lot was at stake with Census 2020. Nonprofits are trusted entities — we have well-established relationships and speak the communities’ language.”

JOAN GUSTAFSON - Michigan Nonprofit Association
The campaign ran ads in rural and urban communities where undercounted residents lived. Ads were posted on Facebook and other social-media platforms and played on Gas Station TV as people pumped gas. The campaign reached thousands of people via ads seen on the Michigan Video Network in 131 full-service Secretary of State offices, and on Comcast, Spectrum, Direct TV, Dish, and WOW in select Michigan communities.

In addition to paid and earned media, the census campaign created a Zoom video, an animated video for children, and a series of videos that showed how children rely on adults to complete the census. The campaign also used organic and social-media posts on Facebook and Instagram.

The campaign highlighted when the census was coming and how it would impact Michiganders’ everyday lives, and it also ran billboards in Detroit, Dearborn, and Pontiac.

The second phase of the campaign was launched in January 2020 and included a specific focus on communities with large ethnic and minority populations (see New Michigan Media below), large populations of families with young children, and rural communities that traditionally have been undercounted in previous censuses.

People were directed to www.MIVoiceCounts.org to learn details about the importance and benefits of completing the census. To help ease fears and rumors, the microsite offered people a chance to read the nine census questions in advance. The site also included additional information, important dates, and contact information for nonprofits in case they needed more information about the 2020 census.
In addition to the 2020 challenges of having fewer census resources and operating through a pandemic, another unique challenge was the uncertainty created by national census policy and the threatened inclusion of a proposed citizenship question on the census form late in the process. Immigrant communities were being asked to provide personal information at a time of great uncertainty about citizenship, immigration policy, legal and job status, and public perception of immigrants.

The outreach plan through traditional media, while comprehensive, nevertheless still needed a significant enhancement if the campaign were to successfully increase the 2020 census count in immigrant communities and communities of color. MNA approached Dr. Hayg Oshagan, founder and director of New Michigan Media (NMM) and associate professor of communications at Wayne State University, and asked him to develop a plan to share census information and boost census participation using his network of more than 140 ethnic and minority media outlets and publications across the state.

“Ten years ago, none of this was done...no one’s advice was taken about their communities, and no one was brought in to get involved with the census project. I am personally very proud of our effort with MNA, to do something the right way, to engage all these minority communities across the state, to do what had never been done here or elsewhere in the U.S.,” HAYG OSHAGAN - New Michigan Media said.
MNA awarded New Michigan Media a $1.2 million grant to plan and implement the outreach strategy for reaching Michigan’s minority populations. With those funds, NMM conducted a messaging and advertising campaign in nearly 100 nontraditional, ethnic, and minority media outlets. Through the partnership with NMM, MNA was able to share census information with the state’s largest ethnic and minority publications, such as the Michigan Chronicle, the Arab American News, the Jewish News, the Latino Press, and the Michigan Korean Weekly.

Oshagan, who initially knew little about the census, immersed himself in census activities. He joined the Governor’s Statewide Complete Count Committee and several other census committees, including committees in Detroit and Wayne County. He also teamed up with the Detroit City Council’s Immigration Task Force to reach Detroit’s immigrant communities. Oshagan also engaged in a very active public speaking campaign, giving more than 40 presentations on the census to multiple communities, including Arab, Latino, Bengali, Chinese, Afro-Caribbean, Jewish, Native

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New Michigan Media began its strategic planning by consulting with the largest minority publishers in the Detroit area, then broadened that conversation to include publishers of minority media across the entire state. MNA and New Michigan Media jointly hosted three Minority Media Summits across the state, inviting public officials to join them. The summits explored what was at stake with the census, the challenges in census participation for different communities, what would be effective messaging, and how community leaders could help spread the word to their communities to get a complete and accurate count.

The first Minority Media Summit on the 2020 census was at Wayne State University in July 2019. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, and Wayne County Executive Warren C. Evans and other luminaries attended, along with almost 80 minority media representatives from the Detroit metro area, including representatives from Yemeni, Filipino, African American, Latinx, Lebanese, Jewish, Haitian and Afro-Caribbean, West African, Native American/Indigenous, Chinese, Bengali, Japanese, Polish, German, Korean, Indian, Armenian, Vietnamese, and Albanian media.
The organization also held summits in Grand Rapids, primarily with Black and Latinx media, and in Gaylord in August 2019. The latter summit included six tribal media outlets that had come together for the first time ever. Some of the media representatives drove more than eight hours (from Marquette) to attend.

These conversations allowed Oshagan to better understand the various challenges that different communities faced with the census. It highlighted the lack of knowledge many communities had about how census data is used, as well as just how little trust people had in the government. The summits also demonstrated the depth and reach of the various media outlets and emphasized that ethnic and minority media were trusted messengers and activist voices in disenfranchised communities and would be the key messengers to help spread the message of the census to their communities.

These media messengers could bring understanding to Latinx and other immigrant communities that completing the census would not cause them to be separated from their children or deported if they were undocumented, for example. In Arab-American communities, a deeper understanding of Census 2020 would show people that completing the census could increase benefits to their families and wouldn’t spark an investigation by the FBI. These and similar insights helped New Michigan Media clarify its message and its strategy.

New Michigan Media eventually created an outreach strategy that focused on regions of the state where minorities lived, and where response rates had been low in 2010. In subsequent conversations with the minority media that served those communities, New Michigan Media determined the appropriate and relevant messaging for each minority group and, using native languages, created print, radio, social media, editorial and video materials with MNA to reach those communities. The campaign stretched across the entire state and included about 100 ethnic and minority media outlets, from newspapers to radio to TV to social media, public events, and presentations.
The Census Hubs organized hundreds of nonprofits within their regions. The nonprofits would then educate communities about the census and why community participation was so important. Each of the hubs galvanized the nonprofits and offered them mini-grants ranging from $2,000 to $20,000 to accomplish outreach goals, organize census activities, and regularly report on their progress.

In order for the hubs to determine grant amounts for local nonprofit organizations, the nonprofits were invited to submit proposals to the hubs. The campaign’s intentional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion training in grant-making resulted in all of the hub site grants being awarded to organizations serving traditionally undercounted populations. Among them, 42% were new grantees.

State Demographer Eric Guthrie was also tremendously helpful in the development of the hub outreach strategy. He assisted MNA in developing a strategic approach that used previous self-response rates, census planning databases, survey results, and other tools to identify the state’s largest concentrations of people who traditionally do not participate in the census.

Drawing on longitudinal data from past census efforts, Guthrie showed that Michiganders who were historically undercounted tended to live in cities such as Detroit, Flint, and Grand Rapids. They also were more likely to be people of color, live in multi-family units, be transient or homeless, and reside with relatives who might not consider them residents and therefore would not count them.

He also found that children, especially those five or younger, often were not counted for a variety of reasons. Data also
showed that families with summer homes would be difficult to count.

Additionally, Guthrie and MNA collaborated with other demographers like Kurt Metzger (director emeritus of Data Driven Detroit and principal of Kurt R. Metzger & Associates) to answer key questions about Michigan’s underrepresented populations. Guthrie also traveled the state with Gustafson and attended many meetings to help explain the census and how the data is used.

MNA also worked closely with U.S. Census Bureau partnership specialists and Ellisa Johnson, deputy regional director for the U.S. Census Bureau’s Chicago Region.

By June 2020, the results of all the work and the effectiveness of the hub strategy started becoming evident. Michigan became the first state in the nation to meet and surpass its 2010 response score, and the state ranked third in the nation for its census self-response rate, tying with Iowa.

The Census Bureau reported that the national self-response rate was 61.5%, and Michigan had a 67.8% self-response rate as of June 18, surpassing the state’s final 2010 self-response rate of 67.7%.

“It was a multi-year program where we were educating, advocating, and then building something from the ground up, and there’s not much more you can say in terms of getting satisfaction from your work, because if we look at just how we did in comparison to 2010 on the self-response score, we see we’ve already done better.”  
ERIC GUTHRIE - Michigan State Demographer
The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered the entire campaign. Outreach plans that included large rallies and events were canceled, and much of MNA’s carefully designed game plan had to be revised.

The first known coronavirus case in Michigan was reported on March 10, 2020, and in less than two weeks cases rose to more than 1,000 in the state, just as households were receiving official Census Bureau mail inviting them to respond to the 2020 Census online, by phone, or by mail. As COVID-19 cases and deaths increased rapidly, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced the state’s stay-at-home order on March 24, limiting when people could leave their home or place of residence. Most retail stores, restaurants, and bars and many other businesses were shut down. Even automakers halted production.

Hospitals in the region filled to capacity and spilled over to makeshift emergency medical centers in tents outside Beaumont Hospital, in Royal Oak, and the TCF Center, Detroit’s convention center.

Social-distancing requirements meant that large gatherings had to be canceled. Even attendance at funerals was limited to 10 people.

These sudden changes had an immediate effect on the state’s nonprofits, and MNA was actively engaged in adjusting and finding creative ways and previously unexplored avenues to continue the outreach work.

Within the first few days of the lockdown, nearly every planned census event was canceled, and the effects rippled through communities around the state.

In Detroit alone, at least 90 census promotional events were canceled and replaced by virtual phone banks run by the city’s census captains. With original plans on hold indefinitely, nonprofit organizations changed course. For example, groups began distributing census information on flyers through programs such as Gleaners Community Food Banks, community food distribution sites, Meals on Wheels, and...
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MNA also had to change its communications campaign, adjusting the look and feel of the campaign and shifting to COVID-specific messaging. Census messages focused on how the census count affects critical community needs such as food, health care, education, and workforce development programs.

“This obviously was a further limitation that none of us could have imagined, but if anybody could pull it through, it would be nonprofits, because we are creative by nature. We rarely have everything that we need to get the work done, but we get it done. We are going to get it done in ways we can’t imagine, but we are going to get it done.”
- Donna Murray-Brown, Michigan Nonprofit Association

As buildings closed, plans for window signage were scrapped. Buses stopped running for a while, and few people were out and about to see billboards and ads on the sides of buses. At least 170 interior bus ads were scheduled to run in Oakland, Macomb, and Wayne counties, but they were canceled due to COVID-19.

But the campaign found creative solutions to get the census message out anyway. Instead of planned video shoots and “person on the street” interviews, the campaign used stock images, animation, and homemade videos.

Gas Station TV continued, but now that most people were at home, MNA purchased ads on Hulu and broadcast television stations and provided public-service announcements through the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

People saw TV ads in markets including Detroit, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Lansing, Flint/Saginaw, Alpena, and Marquette an average of at least nine times on 10 television stations. Nearly 9,000 cable television ad spots also were aired around the state, reaching 58% of the targeted audience. More than 13,000 radio spots were broadcast on 48 stations across the state.

And to reach historically undercounted people, MNA shared census messages on cash register receipts in retail outlets like Family Dollar and Dollar General. Those ads ran for six weeks and targeted areas where people lacked internet access and/or did not have permanent addresses. Audiences also were reached with Facebook, Google, and YouTube ads, and a series of blogs was posted on the MiVoiceCounts.org microsite. Topics included how census data could impact a vaccine for COVID-19, why children needed to be counted in the census, and how congressional representation could be affected in the state.

Newspaper articles in publications such as The Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, and Crain’s Detroit Business and TV/radio interviews discussing the impact COVID-19 was having on census outreach efforts helped continue spreading the message.

Starting in July 2020, when people were able to leave their houses more often, the campaign further adjusted by placing flyers and posters in stores, community centers, and other places people often visited. Lawn signs were posted in yards, and people could frame their faces on Facebook with stickers showing they were counted in the census.
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MNA’s census advocacy work encompassed a wide range of initiatives at the local, regional, state, and federal levels of government to raise awareness and obtain funding, and included on-the-ground, targeted fieldwork to ensure engagement.

At the federal level the Michigan Complete Count team met with the U.S. Census director and the entire Michigan congressional delegation to advocate for Michigan on federal budget and policy issues that affected the state’s census count, including:

- Urging rejection of the request to add a new citizenship question to Census 2020 and stating that the new proposed question would raise concerns in all households about how the government might use the information.

- Advocating for the extension of census operations through Oct. 31, 2020, so that Michigan’s census count would be as complete and accurate as possible while protecting vulnerable populations and census workers.

- Advocating for fully funding the census.

The Michigan Complete Count campaign’s effectiveness was significantly boosted by the work, resources, and assets of the following national partners:

- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.
- National Council of Nonprofits.
- NALEO Educational Fund (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials).
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC).
- The Census Project.
- Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP).

Regionally and locally, MNA worked collaboratively with Census Hubs to facilitate local government and community engagement in Complete Count activities.
At the state level MNA worked with State Demographer Eric Guthrie to identify geographic areas with high concentrations of undercounted populations and then collaborated with him in a series of regional meetings to help explain the census and how the data is used. Complete Count Campaign leadership also held regular meetings with state-level partners that included:

• The Offices of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and former governor Rick Snyder and key cabinet members, such as the director of the Department of Civil Rights and the state budget director.
• The Nonprofit Legislative Caucus, Black Legislative Caucus, and Latino Legislative Caucus.
• The chair of Appropriations in the state House and Senate.
• The Asia Pacific American Affairs Commission.
• The Commission on Middle Eastern Affairs.
• The Hispanic/Latino Commission of Michigan.
• the Michigan Office of New Americans.

MNA also successfully led the efforts in the state legislature to secure two separate appropriations totalling $6 million for Complete Count activities, emphasizing return-on-investment benefits like increased infrastructure funding and retention of congressional influence.

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THE RESULTS

Despite expected and unexpected challenges, the participation of Michigan residents in Census 2020 was record-breaking.
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RESULTS AND MEASURES

The impact of the nonprofit Complete Count Campaign:

- Communications and messaging were effective at increasing participation. Census tracts where the campaign was active had a higher average self-response rate (76.1%) than campaign-inactive tracts (69%) – a 7 percentage point difference.

- Michigan surpassed its 2010 self-response rate of 67.7% by 3.6 percentage points, with a 2020 rate of 71.3%. The cities of Battle Creek and Grand Rapids exceeded their 2010 self-response rates, whereas Detroit and Flint fell short of theirs. Event cancellations resulting from COVID-19 and limited internet access were cited as barriers to goal achievement.

- Hub sites awarded more than $3 million to nearly 300 grantees who helped raise awareness of the 2020 census in historically undercounted communities. Over a third of grantees had not been previously funded, suggesting improved equity in grant-making.

- Grantees provided census materials to 1.24 million homes, 293,320 event attendees, and 271,763 socia-media viewers through 132,276 events and 856 Facebook posts.

(Sources for this section include the U.S. Census Bureau and the Grand Valley State University Johnson Center final report prepared for MNA.)
The efforts of the nonprofit campaign were integral to the overall success of the 2020 census count in Michigan. Michigan was:

- The first state in the nation to match its 2010 census self-response rate.
- The eighth in the nation in census responses — the highest level that Michigan has achieved since at least 1990. It rose from 17th in 2010.
- The state also had a 68.1% self-response rate, compared to a 61.8% national rate. Michigan’s internet self-response rate was 53.3%, compared to a 49.4% national rate.

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