

Tribes and the Census

The Many Steps to 2020

It is now 671 days until April 1, 2020, Census Day for the 2020 decennial census. This appears to be a long way away. But for the Census Bureau and the tribes and Native organizations that have a big stake in an accurate count of all American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) persons, that day is just around the corner.

Preparations for every decennial census take time, over a decade. In November of 2016 the Census Bureau received a report from one of its contractors on "Alternative Futures for the Conduct of the 2030 Census." Getting ready for the 2020 headcount is now well underway.

The biggest issue in these preparations is currently the amount that Congress will appropriate for the 2020 Census in the Fiscal Year that starts this October, FY 2019.

When it finalized the Census Bureau's funding for the current Fiscal Year just over two months ago, the Congress decided to "ramp up" the amount provided for the account in the Commerce Department's budget that includes the 2020 Census, providing over \$2.5 billion, roughly double the amount the Administration had requested.

This month the Appropriations Committee in the House of Representatives continued that ramp up. It approved a funding bill for FY 2019 containing over \$4.5 billion for that account. This level was almost \$1 billion above the Administration's request.

Similar to the language in the official report on the final FY 2018 bill, the House Committee directed the Census Bureau "to ensure that its fiscal year 2019 partnership and communications activities in support of the 2020 Census are conducted at a level of effort no less than that conducted during fiscal year 2009 in preparation for the 2010 Decennial Census."

The House Committee report also stressed the importance of language assistance for small population groups, including those that speak American Indian and Alaska Native languages. It directed the Bureau to provide the Committee with a report on the availability of interviewers and materials for persons speaking these languages.

The report went on to direct the Census Bureau "to increase outreach activities to historically undercounted communities, including colonias [small unincorporated, primarily Hispanic communities along the US-Mexican border]."

Both the amount recommended in the House Appropriations Committee's bill and the report that accompanied the bill have important implications for tribes and Native

American organizations concerned with the accuracy of the count of Native people in 2020. Insuring that the Census Bureau has the resources and direction necessary to conduct outreach and promotion activities is essential in helping tribes and Native organizations to get their members and constituents to respond to the 2020 Census questionnaire.

The directions from Capitol Hill are having an effect. The number of Bureau "partnership specialists," the staff whose job it is to help governments and community-based organizations support the 2020 decennial in their own communities, is now scheduled to double from the 700 to 800 figure first planned. The level that advocates are pushing for in the FY 2019 funding bill is 2,000 partnership specialists or assistants, a major step forward although still significantly lower than the number employed for the 2010 Census.

The Committee's bill must next be approved by the full House of Representatives. From there it goes to the Senate. The Senate Appropriations Committee is tentatively scheduled to take up the Commerce Department funding bill in mid-June.

Geography First

Geography comes first in every census or survey. For tribal governments, the initial major geographic operation leading to 2020 is LUCA, the Local Update of Census Addresses. All federally recognized tribes with a reservation and/or off-reservation trust land were sent invitations to participate in LUCA in mid-2017. Participation gives tribes an opportunity to review the address lists the Census Bureau has for tribal lands to insure that every place where people live is on the list.

The deadline for registering to participate in LUCA was December 15th of last year. Many tribes, both large and small, did register and are participating. Training sessions for tribal staff involved in LUCA are or soon will be underway.

A second geographic program, important to tribes in Oklahoma currently without reservation status, all Alaska Native villages, federally-recognized tribes without a land base and all state-recognized tribes is also underway. It is known in Census jargon as "PSAP," standing for the Participant Statistical Areas Program. Like LUCA it is voluntary.

PSAP participants are given the opportunity to review the boundaries for the statistical areas they represent. These boundaries are ones that are not legally determined, unlike the boundaries of federal reservations and Alaska Native Regions. Instead these statistical areas are established under Census Bureau guidelines and used in the tabulation of Census data. The areas also include some that are within the boundaries

of federal reservations, such as tribal census tracts, tribal block groups and census designated places (CDP).

Eligible participants in the PSAP boundary review process are to receive an official invitation package in July. Major activities in the program are to start at the beginning of next year with the distribution of materials to participants for their review and training through Webinars on how to use those materials.

The third major geographic program involving tribes is the "BAS," the Bureau's Boundary and Annexation Survey. This enables federally recognized tribes with reservation and/or off-reservation trust lands to verify that the boundaries of their areas are correct, or to request changes if the boundaries have shifted from prior years. The BAS is conducted from January to May of every year.

The AI/AN Partnership Program

Census Bureau support for the on-the-ground enumeration operation is centered in the AI/AN Partnership Program. For 2020, this has three main components.

- The Tribal Liaison Program. Tribes have been or are to be contacted by the Census Bureau Regional Offices and asked to designate a tribal leader or staff person as the liaison with the Bureau for 2020. Liaisons receive no Census funding, but get training and support from the Bureau's partnership program. One of the main elements of that support is a Tribal Liaison Handbook. This is expected to be a thorough, well-illustrated guide suggesting ways that the liaison can help to insure that every tribal member and every Indian living on tribal land but enrolled in a different tribe is counted in the 2020 decennial. The Handbook should be available this summer.
- Tribal Complete Count Committees. These Committees are composed of volunteers selected by tribal leaders to help coordinate various outreach activities encouraging participation in the Census.
- A partnership effort with Native community organizations in reservation and off-reservation areas to promote the Census. It is a key activity for groups such as the Indian and Native American grantees for the Native workforce programs supported under Section 166 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Conducting the Count in 2020

As long promised, the 2020 Census is to be different. The Census Bureau is scaling back the role of the paper questionnaire, expecting most people to respond to the 2020 enumeration on line, using computers, tablets or smartphones.

In 2017 the agency conducted a major survey of the various "response modes," on-line questionnaires, mailed paper questionnaires intended to be mailed back and in person interviews with enumerators hired by the Bureau. Preliminary results released last summer showed that roughly 60% of those that responded to the test used the on-line option. However, the response rate for the test was only 50%, possibly indicating that the harder-to-count population may not be as likely to respond on-line.

In the many tribal consultations on the 2020 Census the Bureau conducted over the last several years, tribal leaders repeatedly warned agency managers that the on-line option will not work in many reservation areas where there is limited Internet connectivity.

For reservations without urban-style street addressing, the Bureau will use enumerators to update the physical location of the housing units. Originally the enumerators were to also collect the necessary data through interviews with an adult in the household. Now tribes are to be given a choice as to whether to use that "update-enumerate" procedure, or instead have the enumerators collect the geographic information and then leave a paper questionnaire for an adult in the household to complete privately and mail back -- the "update-leave" option.

As in the past, special enumeration procedures will be used for remote Alaska Native villages.

Another approach is what Bureau staff calls the "mobile response" option. Tested in Los Angeles in 2016, this involves the Bureau providing tablet devices overseen by agency staff in a public place. People can drop by and complete the 2020 questionnaire on the tablets. This would appear useful in reservation areas where tribes could make space available for the Bureau to pursue this approach.

Many steps involved in achieving one result: Insuring that every Native person is counted, and counted as a Native person, in the 2020 Census.

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