



ISSUE BRIEF

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Basics About CENSUS 2000

What is Census 2000?

Every 10 years since 1790, the federal government has counted every resident in the United States, no matter where they live, what language they speak, what nationality they are or what immigration status they have. The decennial census is required by Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution.

About a week before Census Day — April 1, 2000 — most households will receive a questionnaire by mail. Census takers will deliver forms to the remaining households. The Census Bureau blankets the country with census takers who follow up with households that do not return the questionnaire. To ensure that people without conventional housing have the opportunity to be included in Census 2000, the Census Bureau will enumerate clients at service locations such as shelters, soup kitchens, regularly scheduled mobile food vans and hotels and motels used by people who are temporarily without housing. The Census Bureau will also mount outreach efforts to contact people in non-traditional dwellings.

The Census 2000 questionnaire will be easy to read and simple to fill out. Approximately five out of six housing units will receive the short form questionnaire that asks about seven subjects: name, sex, age, relationship, Hispanic origin, race and housing tenure (whether home is owned or rented). Approximately one in six housing units will receive the longer form that asks about the same seven subjects plus 27 others, including education, ancestry, employment, disability and house heating fuel. In some rural areas, as many as every other housing unit may receive the long form because a larger sample is needed to ensure accuracy of the information.

How is census information used?

Census population figures are used to reapportion congressional seats between the states and to modify legislative and congressional district boundaries¹ and certain regional and local service district boundaries.

Federal dollars supporting schools, employment services, housing assistance, highway construction, hospital services, programs for the elderly and more are distributed based on census figures. Census figures were used to distribute nearly \$180 billion in federal funds in fiscal year 1998.²

Census data helps policymakers and academic researchers to understand and focus attention on the most important needs in our communities. Census data helps business

¹ Though the census ultimately provides a wide range of information, the only information available at the time redistricting occurs is population over and under 18 and racial and ethnicity identity.

² Formula Grants: Effects of Adjusted Population Counts on Federal Funding to States, United States General Accounting Office (GAO), February 1999, available online at: <http://www.gao.gov/AIndexFY99/abstracts/he99069.htm>.

leaders and public and private service providers to target services to certain neighborhoods and communities. And, though census data remains confidential for 72 years, it is a source of genealogical information.

What is the Census Bureau doing to promote Census 2000?

The Census 2000 Partnership and Marketing Program is a multi-faceted effort to remind the general population about the census, educate members of the public who do not understand the purpose of the census and its significance to their communities and motivate them to complete their census questionnaires.

Through expanded, formalized partnerships with state, local and tribal governments, private industry and non-governmental organizations, the Census Bureau intends to increase the public's awareness of the census and to increase response rates, especially among historically undercounted populations.

What can legislators do to help promote participation in Census 2000?

According to Census Bureau estimates, approximately 1.9 percent of Oregonians were not counted during the 1990 decennial census resulting in an estimated loss to Oregon of \$162 million dollars in federal formula funding during the 1990s³. A complete count of Oregon citizens helps to assure that Oregon policy makers have the resources to meet the needs of Oregonians.

Legislators can:

- Tape public service announcements now for broadcast on radio and television during the months of February, March and April;
- Conduct a local press conference (near April 1st which is Census Day) to encourage full participation to achieve a complete count;
- Discuss the importance of Census 2000 and provide promotional materials at public forums, during campaign activities, in constituent newsletters and during any contact with members of the public;
- Join a Complete Count Committee for your county(ies) or, if there is no local committee, start one; and
- Inform constituents about job opportunities with the Census Bureau.

These ideas are particularly important for rural legislators and for legislators who have large populations of historically undercounted populations: racial and language minorities, people living in poverty or dealing with literacy issues and people housed in group quarters, temporary shelters or outdoor camps. Complete Count Committees are most active in urban centers like Portland Metro, Salem and Lane County. Because the Census Bureau assigns partnership specialists – census employees focused on promotion and outreach – on the basis of population, there is only one partnership specialist assigned to the Bend and Eugene offices with responsibility for 24 Southern and Eastern Oregon counties.

³ Formula funded programs distribute money among the states based on various factors including a population component. It should be noted that the GAO report cited in footnote 1 estimated the loss of federal funding in Oregon at just over \$35 million during the 1990s. Both estimates are included in Appendix 1. In either case, it seems apparent that Oregon can increase the amount of funding received by efforts to ensure a complete count of individuals living in Oregon.

- How can I contact the Census Bureau?* The Census Bureau has established five regional offices to serve the State of Oregon in Beaverton, Bend, Eugene, Portland and Salem. See Appendix 2 for address, phone/fax numbers and a map of the counties covered by each local office.
- What information is attached to this issue brief?* Appendix 1: Estimated Population Undercount and U.S. Census Bureau and GAO estimates of Oregon's lost revenue due to undercount.
Appendix 2: Oregon Census Office Contact Information and Regional Coverage Map.

Additional Resources:

U.S. Census Bureau, available online at: <http://www.census.gov>.

Census in Oregon Home Page, available online at: <http://www.oca.das.state.or.us/census2000/>.

Fact Sheets About Census 2000, U.S. Census Bureau, available online at: <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/fctsheet.htm>

Census in the Schools: Teaching Materials for the Classroom, U.S. Census Bureau, available online at: <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/schindex.htm>

Census Partnerships, U.S. Census Bureau, available online at: <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/partner.htm>

National Conference of State Legislatures Elections and Redistricting Page, available online at: <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/elect/elredist.htm>