



## Introduction to the New York State Census Equity Fund

New York’s future fiscal health and political voice in Washington seem bleak if predictions about an undercount in the 2020 Decennial Census come true. An undercount could mean the loss of \$1.5 billion each year over the next decade in federal aid provided through 75 programs which are apportioned and distributed to states and localities using census data. New York’s congressional representation could also shrink from 27 to 25 seats.<sup>1</sup>

These predictions can be changed through targeted investments and coordinated work by government, philanthropy, nonprofits, and the business community to make sure that every resident in every county in New York is counted in the 2020 census. The New York Census Equity Fund, a new funders collaborative at The New York Community Trust, seeks to ensure an accurate count of New York’s residents in the 2020 Census, and help secure a fair share of the more than \$700 billion that the federal government is expected to distribute to state governments in the next ten years based on Census 2020 data.<sup>2</sup>

## Background

New York currently receives \$53.2 billion in federal dollars *each year* to pay for vital community assets (i.e., schools, hospitals, etc.) as well as programs for vulnerable New Yorkers like Medicaid, Section 8, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Head Start, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, schools, based on 2010. Included in that figure are allocations of \$2.4 billion for education, \$4.1 billion for housing, \$6.8 billion for human services, and \$1.7 billion for transportation.<sup>3</sup>

Counting *all* the people in every one of the nation’s neighborhoods, towns, and cities has always been a challenge. Over the years, demographers at the Census Bureau have determined with considerable accuracy what census analysts call “hard-to-count” communities, where low response rates historically result in an undercount of residents. There are numerous hard-to-count census tracts and regions throughout New York State—areas with sizable rural populations, low-income people of color, immigrants, non-English speaking individuals, migrant workers, ex-offenders, children under five, older adults, people with disabilities, renters, the homeless, and those living in

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<sup>1</sup> Lawmakers and Advocates Call on New York Not to be a Penny Wise and a Pound Foolish in Lack of Planning for Problem Filled 2020 US Census (Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, January 2018) <http://nyassembly.gov/mem/Marcos-A-Crespo/story/79140>

<sup>2</sup> The Fund defines **Census equity** as the equitable allotment of Census-related resources to ensure that the data collected through the census process accurately and fairly represents the residential population in every county of New York State.

<sup>3</sup> THE COUNT STARTS NOW: Taking Action to Avoid a Census 2020 Crisis (New York Common Cause / New York Count)

mobile homes (trailer parks) or multi-unit residences. In 2010, it's estimated that more than 700,000 New Yorkers in hard-to-count communities and regions were not counted, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars in federal aid and two congressional seats.

## **The New York State Census Equity Fund**

The 2020 Census will be one of the most challenging. The Trump administration's proposal to add a citizenship question to the Census form could deter participation in immigrant communities. It also will be the first time that the Census will be completed online, posing challenges for communities where broadband access is limited. Additionally, the Census Bureau's staffing and other resources have been reduced. Without the resources to adequately conduct the census, marginalized, rural, poor, and minority communities, as well as young children are more likely to be undercounted in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, The New York Community Trust joined with other foundations across the State to create the New York State Census Equity Fund in order to ensure coverage of the State's hard-to-count communities in the 2020 Census. The Fund brings together local, regional, national foundations, and individual donors, through joint (pooled) and aligned grantmaking to support complete census count efforts in neighborhoods, town, rural and isolated areas across the State with large populations of low-income people, people of color, immigrants, non-English speaking individuals, migrant workers, ex-offenders, children under five, older adults, people with disabilities, the homeless, and other groups that are at risk of being undercounted.

### ***Fund Steering Committee***

The Fund is led by a Steering Committee comprised of donors from across the State:

- Maria Marcantonio – Charles H. Revson Foundation
- Robyn Smith – Central New York Community Foundation
- Randi Hewit – Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes
- Katie Pieri – Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
- Jennifer Drake – Dyson Foundation
- Sol Marie Alfonso Jones – Long Island Community Foundation
- Maria Mottola – New York Foundation
- Patricia Swann – The New York Community Trust

### ***Fund Priorities & Goals***

The Fund's grantmaking focuses on three main areas: community education and mobilization, advocacy at the state level, and technical assistance. Jeffrey M. Wice, Director of the NY Counts project at SUNY's Rockefeller Institute of Government, has been commissioned to develop a statewide census strategy that will identify specific hard-to-count towns, cities, and rural areas, as well as hard-to-count constituencies that are not tied to specific geographic areas. The strategy also will identify gaps in resources such as communications and technology that could support the efforts of organizations throughout the state.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Page 9

Over the next three years, the Fund will:

- Raise and direct approximately \$3 million from foundations and individual donors to nonprofits that are trusted messengers to engage historically undercounted constituencies in New York's hardest-to-count neighborhoods, towns and rural areas in the 2020 census.
- Support statewide efforts that promote Census equity, including advocacy and technical assistance that benefit groups throughout the State.
- Coordinate philanthropic Census-related activities with appropriate government entities, including the Census Bureau's regional office, and state and local government officials.
- Facilitate learning opportunities for funders around the State so they stay informed about and up to date on the 2020 Census.
- Lay the groundwork for broader civic engagement, particularly around redistricting after the Census.

### ***Grantmaking Activities & Timeframe***

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Promote complete count in New York's hard-to-count communities and constituencies;
- Increase awareness of and address residents' concerns about participating in the Census; and,
- Provide technical assistance in such areas as communications and technology to community based and statewide groups to advance a fair and accurate count.

Using a request for proposal process, the Fund will support census-related efforts of nonprofits in hard-to-count areas of the State, including:

- Community-based organizations serving hard-to-count constituencies.
- Organizations that educate/mobilize people in shelters or living in streets.
- Libraries to hire multi-lingual census navigators to staff computer kiosks.
- Business Improvement Districts and community organizations to deploy people of color to neighborhood businesses (i.e., beauty salons, barbershops, etc.) in the days/weeks leading up to census day.
- Settlement houses, community centers, and other service providers to train caseworkers, receptionists, and other frontline staff to be census navigators.
- Childcare centers to educate/mobilize parents of children under five.
- Independent community and ethnic (media) newspapers.
- Faith-based community organizing networks to educate/mobilize people at congregation services.

There will be three rounds of grants: Two in 2019 (one in the spring for census planning, advocacy, and technical assistance work; and another one in the fall for census education, outreach, and get-out-the count work); one in 2020 (for get-out-the-count activities during the census mail-in and enumeration phases, and post-census non-partisan redistricting efforts). Additional grants for redistricting could be made in 2021. The size of the grants will be based on the nature and scope of the proposed projects.

## ***Learning Activities***

In collaboration with Philanthropy New York, New York Funders Alliance, and Engage New York, the Fund also will:

- Host webinars, panels, and convenings to ensure that funders in the State have the most up-to-date information and resources regarding the 2020 Census;
- Support communities with little philanthropic infrastructure and high-need for mobilization efforts; and,
- Inform census-related work across the State to reduce duplication and maximize impact.

Additionally, The Fund will be working closely with the national funders that have come together under the umbrella of the Democracy Funders Collaborative—Census Subgroup—as well as with local and state government officials.

## ***Grantmaking Decisions***

The Fund's Steering Committee will develop procedures for making decisions about budget allocations and grant decisions. Our goal is to raise \$3 million, of which all but \$300,000 is expected to be distributed as grants to nonprofits and institutions throughout the state from January 2019 through December 2021. Trust staff, augmented by consultant support as needed, will be responsible for arranging meetings, preparing proposals and reports for contributors, and coordinating with the Census Equity Fund's Steering Committee in administering and monitoring grants.

All grantees will adhere to The Trust's due diligence process. Two items fundamental to the process include: IRS status and most recent audit (or Form 990 for groups that do not meet the State's budget threshold to require an audit). The Trust also requires: a standard cover sheet submitted online through its grant portal; a current board list; and a board-approved operating budget. The Trust requires further inquiry and clarification if an organization submits financials that are older than three to four years, shows recurring deficits, or has a board that is dominated by paid staff and/or family members of paid staff. To alleviate concerns about agility and missed opportunities, The Trust is open to channeling grants via fiscal sponsors, or awarding to non-501(c)(3) entities, if necessary. The Trust's charter requires that its President, Lorie Slutsky, give final approval to all grant recommendations made by the Steering Committee.

The Trust has set a minimum contribution of \$10,000 *for voting purposes*, in the event an internal vote is required, in accordance with the decision-making process that will be established by the Fund's Steering Committee. Acknowledging the insight that local foundations bring to this work, it's been determined that all contributors to the Fund will have the option of restricting up to 75% of their contribution to grantees in their targeted service areas, with the balance of their contribution being made available for statewide projects.

## **About The New York Community Trust**

Founded in 1924, The New York Community Trust is the largest private funder of New York City nonprofits. The Trust ended 2017 with assets approximating \$2.8 billion in more than 2,000 charitable funds, and awarded over \$224 million in grants. As New York's community foundation, The Trust has a long tradition of working with government, other funders, and nonprofits to find effective solutions to society's problems. This work often involves creating and managing donor collaboratives. In the past 40 years, The Trust has been home to 21 collaborative funds that have distributed more than \$121 million. Current collaborative funds include the Early Childhood Partners, Donors Education Collaborative, the Fund for New Citizens, New York City Cultural Agenda Fund, and the New York City Workforce Development Fund.

The Trust's involvement in the census goes back to 1999, when it awarded a \$30,000 grant to the City Planning Department to help them submit a formal supplement to the Census Bureau's list of NYC addresses to mail census forms to. For the 2010 census, The Trust and New York Foundation led the 2010 Census Funder's Initiative, which raised over \$600,000 and made 30+ grants, primarily to immigrant and community organizations, for census outreach and education. The Trust's affiliate, the Long Island Community Foundation, also raised over \$300,000 to support census outreach and education in communities in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Response rates in neighborhoods targeted by the Initiative's grantees increased by up to 6 percent. The City's overall census response rate increased by 3 percent in 2010.

## **Conclusion**

Federal aid and apportionment of congressional seats happens at the state level using census data. If one region is undercounted, all other localities in the State are set to lose federal funding and congressional representation. The New York Census Equity Fund provides an opportunity for local, state, regional, and national funders to work together on an initiative that will have an immediate and long-lasting impact on the entire State. By strategically pooling and distributing resources to hard-to-count communities across the State, including in regions with little or no philanthropic support, funders can ensure that every person is counted in the 2020 Census, the State keeps its congressional seats, and receives its fair share of federal funds to support education, health, social services, and other vital programs and services for New Yorkers in the next decade.