

Michigan Municipal League

Webinar – 2020 Census: Getting a Complete Count During COVID-19

April 2, 2020

Q&A

One problem I found with the online census was that, if a couple lives apart due to work, and the respondent only enters information for themselves, the census does not ask you for your marital status or other family members. You must know to enter your other family members on the form even if they are living elsewhere or the census will not ask you for information about them.

Eric Guthrie: The census does ask at every residence about people who live there most of the time. If we have a circumstance where a couple is married but live apart most of the time (more than 6 months out of the year), each member of that couple should be filling out the census at the address where they live most of the time. The way the residency rules work, if the person filled out the form and did not include their spouse who lives at the same address the majority of the year, the person can go back into the online form. They can't use their unique ID again, but they can go through the non-ID process: right below where they would've used the code, there's a link that states "If you do not have a Census ID, click here.". They can go back in and fill out the form with their spouse or other omitted information – those responses will be combined into a household. People can still respond to the census even if they were left off the original household response.

Are the restrictions on field workers placed in accordance with local State/Governor orders, or decided at the federal level?

Eric Guthrie: My understanding is that they are being guided by federal policy, though I don't believe the Census Bureau would want to violate local/state orders. I am not aware of any clear guidance that indicates the Census Bureau is specifically following every local/state or area's guidance.

Kerry Ebersole Singh: There's no formal guidance, but we have had conversations with the regional census: they plan at looking at any changes or alterations to their field operations in coordinating with local/public officials. The federal government had talked about April 30th as the current social distancing deadline – they'll continue

to monitor things as they go along and adjust accordingly. The census is in our US constitution: we must do a census count every ten years, unless we have a constitutional amendment. As Eric Guthrie talked about, there are two statutory deadlines. December 31st is one of them – that is when the counts get turned over to the President. Encourage all your communities to complete the census form by April 30th. The sooner we get it done, the better it is for all of us.

Any suggestions for university communities where off campus students are now at parents until at least fall when classes resume?

Kerry Ebersole Singh: I have been very engaged with the Michigan Association of State Universities. They have identified census leads at every university. In part, we are working with them to disseminate best practices amongst those universities. MSU has done a number of things: they have a tab on their website that addresses the census question for college students; they've been sending emails to college students; and are planning additional communications to students. From a state perspective, we are looking at how we can bolster that outreach. We are looking at doing text messaging campaigns: universities are either willing to share cell phone numbers of students with us, or will send the messages out themselves. The other thing as we've gotten some indication from Senator Peters' office: for those students that go away to school, we want to make sure they use their college address (whether in a dorm or off-campus). We want to get as much data and as many people to complete that census information, college students in particular, by April 30.

Eric Guthrie: When we talk about college students, the consistent message is that if they are not living with their parents/if they're away at college, they should be counted at their college address. That is the end of that guidance. Anything we can do to make sure we are delivering that consistent message is helpful. We are working with universities and the Census Bureau to facilitate that college count in any way we can. If you have a mechanism to speak to the students who are living off-campus and are back with their families/homes, they can still go on with the unique ID that was sent to their college household to fill out the form for every person who lives in that household, or each individual member can go in and use the non-ID process to complete the census form for their school address even if they are temporarily living with their parents due to COVID-19.

Is there a place where we can get just in time participation mapping. I'd like to promote in our neighborhoods as a competition....:

Eric Guthrie: The Census Bureau does have response rates available online and they are relatively frequently updated. You can get local response rates there. Counties, city, township, congressional district, and tribal areas are the geographies available. See the link below. You can drill down to census tract with daily data.

<https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>

Kerry Ebersole Singh: I talked about that 14-day countdown as we strive for the 82% self-response rate as a state. I am looking at making some additional changes to the Michigan.gov/census2020 website where we'll have running numbers in terms of how our percentage is changing daily going into April 30th. Response rate information is available at the city/county level, and we could also look at adding an access point where those rankings are hosted. I already have a spreadsheet that changes every day at about 3pm. One of my commitments is figuring out how to host that on our website.

SEMCOG Response rate map by county, community and census tract:

<https://maps.semco.org/ResponseRates/>

So colleges/universities and prison communities are eligible (will receive) more federal tax dollars and programming. Correct?

Eric Guthrie: When we talk about the relationship between dollars and person, that relationship isn't perfectly linear, but it's based on the distribution of population. When we talk about the myriad federal programs available, many depend on census counts. If your census count is low (because whatever population is not being counted in your local area), then yes, that will affect the myriad federal programs whose dollar distributions are in some way based on the census. I can't give you a specific dollar amount for each community, but we can talk about averages and generalities. A number we have been using is that for every person not counted, a state stands to lose \$3000 in federal dollars. This is a vital activity in terms of maintaining appropriate funding for all areas, including local areas.

Where can communities update a field list of new addresses within the last ten years that were not been sent to LUCA before the deadline?

Eric Guthrie: They cannot at this point. It is too late. They had the opportunity during LUCA, during the new construction program, and there were follow-ups to that. If local areas chose not to participate in those programs, those updates are not possible at this point.

John, if couples fill out their own census forms separately, the census does not know that we are married or single. Is that no longer important?

Eric Guthrie: There is a question on the form that asks about the individual's relationship to the householder. That is where they indicate the relationship.

What is the actual name of your Michigan Census facebook page? It isn't showing up when I search:

<https://www.facebook.com/MiCensus/>

As a community with a large Arabic population, I thought that was going to be included as an option for national origin?

Eric Guthrie: That is a good observation. The Census Bureau spent about 10 years researching the race and ethnicity question. The Bureau made recommendations to OMB to combine the race/ethnicity question (which is the Hispanic/non-Hispanic & the race question). They also recommended a MENA category, which stands for Middle Eastern/North African. However, the Bureau does not control what racial categories are collected in: that is under the purview of the OMB. The OMB made a choice not to decide (they did not respond to Bureau's recommendations to make those changes), so the census had no choice but to follow the current guidance and the current racial categories, which do not include a MENA category.

Any particular outreach going on to address Latino and migrant populations?

Eric Guthrie: There are a lot of efforts to reach out to all ethnic communities – not just Hispanic. The form is printed in two languages: English and Spanish. The Census Bureau has made an effort to send bilingual forms to areas with high concentrations of persons that identify as being Hispanic or Latino. The promotional materials are in multiple languages. Speaking to the migrant workers in Michigan (while migrant workers are not exclusively Hispanic): we've submitted the locations of those places

to the Census Bureau and they are working with the administrators of those facilities to make sure they are counted.

For text message campaigns that municipalities might run, do you have any suggestions on how to ensure people think the text/link is legitimate and not spam? It'll include a .gov address, of course, but people are suspicious of everything.

Kerry Ebersole Singh: I think that introducing the text (“Hi, this is Kerry Ebersole Singh from the City of East Lansing” as an example), if you can personalize it. Whether it’s the mayor’s office or the councilperson – localize or introduce the text in that way. It’s a legitimate website link you would be sending in terms of the direct link to the census form. The other suggestion is letting your community know that you’ll be doing outreach via text about the census because you recognize that a lot of people communicate that way. Raising awareness and letting folks know what you’re up to and why you’re doing it is always a good rule of thumb.

Eric Guthrie: If local areas are making that web address visible in their communities, people will be able to correlate the addresses are the same – between text messages and things they’re seeing locally.