

THE FUNDERS CENSUS INITIATIVE

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CUNY CENSUS MAPPING WEBSITE TRACKS RESPONSE IN HARD-TO-COUNT AREAS TO HELP ADVOCATES TARGET FINAL PUSH

Interactive Maps Rank Tracts by Response; Show Areas to Receive Replacement Forms; Analyze Patterns of Response

New York City – A new analysis of “participation rates” through March 30 found that census tracts with higher Hard to Count (HTC) scores have been running about ten to twenty percentage points lower than tracts with lower scores, regardless of their location. “The Census Bureau’s hard-to-count scoring system seems to be a good predictor, so far, of likelihood of initial response to the census,” observed Steven Romalewski, director of the CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center. Mr. Romalewski noted that census tracts in urban areas are posting much lower participation rates than those located in non-urban and other non-urbanized areas of the country as of March 30 (43% median participation v. 49% and 54%, respectively).

National and community-based advocates promoting census participation in historically hard-to-count communities can track mail-back progress, assess factors that might be contributing to lagging response, and identify areas that will receive replacement forms in the coming days, using CUNY’s Census 2010 Hard To Count interactive mapping website. The **Census 2010 Hard-To-Count Interactive Map** [www.CensusHardToCountMaps.org] not only pinpoints census tracts that the U.S. Census Bureau considers difficult to enumerate, it also displays the detailed demographic and housing characteristics that the Census Bureau believes will create challenges to achieving an accurate count in certain communities, allowing census advocates to tailor their activities and messages to address specific barriers, such as language difficulties or low educational attainment.

An analysis of participation rate patterns over the first weeks is posted at <http://www.urbanresearch.org/resources/census2010participation>. The analysis includes maps

showing the daily progress of response rates over the first weeks of the Mail-out/Mail-back operation, which started with advance letters on March 8 and covers most American households.

Census Bureau research has identified twelve factors – including language barriers, large numbers of renters, high poverty rates, and a prevalence of non-traditional households, alone or in combination -- that contribute to a difficult environment for the census. “The website provides visual evidence of those challenges with powerful maps and interactive data,” Mr. Romalewski said, “and allows advocates to tailor their outreach to specific neighborhoods.”

The project’s development represents an effective partnership between academia, business, nonprofits, and the philanthropic community. The mapping site was made possible by a grant from the Long Island-based Hagedorn Foundation and is supported by the Funders Census Initiative (FCI), a unique and unprecedented ad hoc coalition of foundations and philanthropic affinity groups interested in a fair and accurate census. “We know that national and grassroots organizations conducting outreach in hard-to-count neighborhoods are making a difference on-the-ground, even if the progress is modest at first,” said Hagedorn Foundation Executive Director Darren Sandow. “These advocates are facing tremendous challenges, but without their efforts to serve as ‘trusted voices’ in these communities, the census would be lagging even more among the most vulnerable populations.”

The mapping tool is based on the Census Bureau’s Tract Level Planning Database (<http://2010.census.gov/partners/research/>), which identified twelve population and housing characteristics associated with low mail response in the 2000 census. In addition to showing these characteristics within hard-to-count census tracts, the database shows tracts with low 2000 census mail return rates and high foreclosure risk. Site users can view hard-to-count census tracts within states, counties, metro areas, cities, and Tribal lands, as well as congressional districts and ZIP Codes. Location-specific links to the Census Bureau’s web site allows users to access demographic and economic profiles of each area, including racial and ethnic composition, from either the 2000 census or American Community Survey (which replaced the census long form starting in 2005).

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[Next page: Background]

Background: The Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research (CUR) (www.urbanresearch.org) is part of The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (CUNY). It undertakes many mapping initiatives and amplifies the spatial dimension of research undertaken by CUR, including that of the CUNY Data Service and New York City Labor Market Information Service. The Mapping Service's expertise lies in the use of geographic information systems (GIS) to understand, visualize, and analyze data sets for a variety of urban planning issues including demographic change, land use trends, social service availability, educational needs, public health, and environmental quality. In addition to Mr. Romalewski, the CUNY Mapping Service team that developed the **Census 2010 Hard To Count** site includes David Burgoon, Application Architect, and Christina Spielman, GIS Design Consultant.

The Funders Census Initiative (<http://funderscommittee.org/funderscensusinitiative>) was established in late 2008 and has since worked at the national, state, and local levels to direct resources to nonprofits for 2010 census outreach and promotion activities targeting underserved communities and hard-to-count populations. The Hagedorn Foundation is a founding member of the FCI.

The 2010 Census Planning Database uses six "person" characteristics:

- language isolation;
- unemployment;
- mobility;
- below poverty level;
- receiving public assistance; and
- no high school diploma ...

... and six housing characteristics:

- crowded housing;
- multi-unit buildings;
- lack of telephone in home;
- vacancy rate;
- renter occupied; and
- complex households ...

...to calculate "hard-to-count" scores, ranging from 0 – 132 for every census tract in the country. The new mapping site uses a threshold score of 61 or higher to identify hard-to-count census tracts. The cutoff score of 61+ identifies roughly the top 20% of all tracts nationwide that are the hardest-to-count.

The Census Bureau's hard-to-count scores do not incorporate mail response rates or race and Hispanic origin in the calculation but research shows a strong correlation between hard-to-count neighborhoods, low mail response, and high percentages of people of color. *Mail response rates* represent the percent of all housing units, occupied and vacant, which do not return a census form by mail; *final response rates* build on this measure to include telephone responses and late mail returns. *Mail return rates* represent the percent of occupied housing units (e.g. households) that return a form by mail or respond by telephone. None of these measures include responses from the second major census operation – door-to-door visits to collect information from unresponsive homes (called Nonresponse Follow-Up).