



SAN DIEGO AND IMPERIAL COUNTIES
CENSUS OUTREACH COALITION

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Count Me 2020 Non-Profit Leaders Take Precautions, Go Extra Mile to Ensure Accurate 2020 Census Count

High-tech to 'old fashioned' outreach, passion fuels their efforts, PLUS what members want you to know about the 2020 Census

SAN DIEGO – April 8, 2020 – With intense mobilization by federal, state and local governments to ensure the safety of San Diego County residents in the wake of COVID-19, San Diego nonprofits are delivering essential services and also continuing the important conversations to encourage 2020 Census participation.

With just four months to go until the current 2020 Census deadline, the [Count Me 2020 Coalition](#), a network of more than 150 community groups, municipalities, and civic institutions, faces its toughest challenge yet.

More than \$4.36 million has been invested in outreach for San Diego and Imperial Counties, and thousands of hours spent working over the last two years to reach up to a million residents who are considered hard-to-count. The Count Me 2020 Coalition and its members have hosted more than 1,000 events and made more than 600,000 impressions with HTC residents of San Diego and Imperial Counties, using both traditional and innovative outreach tactics targeted at specific communities that were undercounted in 2010. As of April 6, 2020 the self-response rate for San Diego County is 49.4% (the State of California self-response rate is 45.5% and 45.7% nationally). *Source:*

2020census.gov/en/response-rates.

But with the shelter-in-place ordinances to keep residents at home and safe, the planned in-person events, cultural celebrations, education sessions, and canvassing have come to a grinding halt. However, the passion still remains as the Count Me 2020 Coalition continues to deliver essential services, and educate their communities on the importance of their participation in the once-every-ten-years population count.

“For so many of us, the COVID-19 health crisis is top of mind, but we need to remember to fill out the 2020 Census. Doing so gives voice to our San Diego community, and data collected from the Census determines the fate of millions of dollars in federal funding, as well as our state’s allotment of Congressional Representatives,” said **California Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins**

. “Filling out the Census is quick, simple, and in just a few minutes, we can help our community. And right now, that feels pretty great.”

“The COVID-19 health pandemic is a resounding reminder that we have to ensure, through participation in the 2020 Census, that our communities have the federal, state and local funding necessary to meet San Diego County health needs and concerns,” says **Michele Silverthorn, project lead, Count Me 2020 Coalition**. “A complete and accurate Census count confirms how many people live in our area and helps guide the allocation of up to \$1.5 trillion in federal funding, and this opportunity only comes once every 10 years.”

Count Me 2020 Coalition Members Now Operate ‘Virtual Assistance Centers’ for 2020 Census

Many of the organizations in the Count Me 2020 Coalition were originally hosting “Questionnaire Assistance Centers,” where individuals and families could come in-person to ask questions and seek in-language support to complete the 2020 Census through a mobile wi-fi connected kiosk or over the phone.

But during the pandemic, Coalition members have had to quickly pivot to adjust to this new “stay-at-home” environment, which is not without its challenges. The [Advancement Project](#) has identified barriers to Census participation include uncertainty about the purpose and use of Census data; uncertainty about who should be included; fear or mistrust of the government; and limited English proficiency. Limited access to broadband internet is also a challenge for individuals to complete the Census online.

Mix of ‘Old-Fashioned’ and ‘High-Tech’ Outreach to Connect with People Where They Are

Count Me 2020 Coalition Members, such as Bayside Community Center, the [Union of Pan Asian Communities \(UPAC\)](#), Think Dignity!, the Asian-Pacific Islander Initiative, and many others now continue their outreach work remotely, providing “Virtual Assistance Centers,” answering questions on the phone and directing community members to online tools and resources such as language guides and multi-lingual telephone numbers all designed to help complete the Census in the privacy and comfort of their own residence.

The Bayside Community Center in Linda Vista is hand-delivering grocery bundles twice a month that are full of fresh produce and non-perishable food items to seniors at home. This essential service addresses urgent needs, and they take the opportunity to educate hard-to-count populations about how their participation in the 2020 Census will increase our neighborhood’s access to critical resources. “The informational flyers are in their native language, and spark conversation about the Census as we drop-off the groceries,” says **Adam Osorio of Bayside Community Center**. “If they have additional questions or want in-depth guidance, we encourage them to call Bayside to speak to a case manager or the U.S. Census Bureau directly.”

Velia Gitari, the manager of the Elder Multicultural Access and Support Services program at UPAC, says that no longer physically being in our centers in North County, East County, and Central San Diego is difficult. “Even though the 2020 Census is digital, we are reaching out to our seniors by phone because they prefer to speak to someone to hear a friendly voice and may not be comfortable with technology,” says Gitari. “When we call we ask them if they have filled out their Census, and if they haven’t, we ask them what is holding them back? We hope to decrease participation barriers by encouraging them to do the Census on the phone in their preferred language.”

Mitchelle Woodson, the executive director and managing attorney at Think Dignity, has had to reassess the homeless advocacy agency's strategy for Census outreach because many of their programs needed to be put on hiatus due to social distancing restraints. Their Transition Storage Center in Downtown San Diego is one of the few facilities in operation during this time. "Our storage center has become a frontline resource for homeless individuals, and we provide Census information here," says Woodson. "We also provide hygiene packs with Census information in each to continue our efforts."

JoAnn Fields is a veteran to Census outreach efforts. This is the community organizer's third Census and her passion shows. For the 2020 Census, she is working on behalf of the Asian Pacific Islander Initiative and Paving Great Futures. "Our community has experienced the benefits and the missed opportunities after each Census," says Fields. "It is important to educate and motivate our underserved communities to participate so we can have an accurate and complete count." The API Initiative will host a series of Virtual Town Hall meetings, which began on Census Day, April 1, 2020 and featured California Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins. In the meeting presented online via Zoom, they demonstrated how to complete the nine question Census survey online and on the phone. With Paving Great Futures, Armand King is producing an online video series called "From the Streets to the Suites," where community leaders are interviewed by their Census Ambassadors on the importance of Census participation.

Fields also relies on "low-tech" outreach methods as well. On Saturday, April 4, 2020 through partnerships with the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council and Feeding San Diego over 1,500 Census information flyers will be distributed in food boxes to individuals and families in need. "Our current emergency situation with COVID-19 is a perfect example of why we need to have an accurate and complete Census count," says Fields. "We need to know how many people need to shelter-in-home. How many older adults may need food and support during this time of crisis? How many students need free lunch or assistance to access the internet for distance learning? What languages are needed to share emergency announcements? The Census really helps us plan and advocate for community resources."

What You Need to Know About the 2020 Census

Count Me 2020 coalition members urge residents from underserved communities and neighborhoods to complete the Census, either online or on the phone, as soon as possible. "Taking the Census is safe, easy, private, and it matters. We need everyone to fill out the 2020 Census form so our communities can get the resources we need. There is no citizenship question on the Census," says Silverthorn. "One person should respond for the entire household, including everyone who lives and sleeps there most of the time, as of April 1, 2020. Don't forget to count the children who live with you."

In San Diego and Imperial Counties, the majority of 2020 Census efforts are coordinated through the Count Me 2020 Coalition, led by the United Way of San Diego County, with support from SANDAG and the County of Imperial.

To learn more and to get started on the 2020 Census, visit www.countme2020.org. Additional resources for media and the public are available below.

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