The decennial census is a nonpartisan exercise and a cornerstone of our democracy. Every 10 years, the U.S. Constitution requires that all residents, including non-citizens and undocumented immigrants, be counted through a nationwide census. Collecting accurate census data is an essential part in determining a fair allocation of federal funds and political representation at the federal, state, and local levels. The 2020 Census has a wide-ranging and long-term impact on the future of our Commonwealth.

Every decennial census has unusual features, but the 2020 Census was unsurpassed for pressure: it was undertaken during the dual pressures of a politically-charged national environment and a global health crisis.

Knowing the traditional difficulties of getting an accurate census count, the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund (“MCEF”) began its journey in the summer of 2018, convening through 2020. The work included bringing together foundations, nonprofits, community leaders, U.S. Census representatives as well as local, state, and federal officials. MCEF’s goal was to allocate grants statewide to increase participation in the 2020 Census specifically in communities that were at significant risk of being undercounted.
Ensuring an accurate count through overwhelming adversity

MCEF’s philanthropic partners, staff, technical consultants, and, most important of all, the 85 grantee organizations did a remarkable job of carrying on with census education and outreach through the realities of the pandemic and to the constantly shifting messages from Washington DC. Grantees conducted Census outreach in whatever ways they could, and many did so alongside addressing community emergency needs. They did this with imagination and truly inspiring dedication.

Collaboration and Partnership

By working together with Massachusetts Secretary of State’s Complete Count Committee, MassCounts, the state’s grassroots coalition of organizations, and the regional office of the US Census Bureau, MCEF stayed informed of all aspects of the census. Utilizing these relationships MCEF connected grantees to the most up to date resources that were available to them and all the changes/challenges that were occurring daily.

Grantee activities were the most important contributors to the MCEF initiative. MCEF’s Consultant and partners were also key to the program’s success. These participants were indispensable in countless ways. They secured the engagement of funders, selected grantees, shared vital information, and facilitated collaborations. They extended encouragement and understanding when there appeared to be no light at the end of the tunnel, and nudged along organizations when they were overwhelmed by the challenges.

It is important to note that the MCEF funders, under the leadership of Access Strategies Fund, played direct and active roles in guiding this initiative and were active in planning the gatherings. The funders’ group stayed distant from day-to-day management, but remained engaged in the achievements of the staff and grantees.

MCEF Grantees overwhelmingly shared that being a part of the MCEF circle helped their census work by providing multiple forms of support and resources. As grantees struggled to navigate operations during the pandemic, they relied on help that was professional, friendly, timely and flexible.

Notably, for many organizations the funds received from the MCEF were useful in helping them secure hard-to-raise additional resources. Only a few were able to access state funds through the Secretary of State’s office. Over half of the MCEF grantees requested funds from the state, but only a few were able to secure that funding. The MCEF grantee groups advocated for the Secretary of State to spend all of the resources allocated to support the 2020 Census effort. These community groups and the MCEF steering committee offered support for allocating the resources, but the Secretary of State’s office was not responsive.
Communications

The federal government created barriers and instituted limitations that made an accurate census count challenging. A few grantee organizations noted that the Census Bureau was difficult to coordinate efforts with and that their advertised resources were inadequate. Washington’s messages were troubling and shifting, creating extra work in crafting clear local communication.

Communication and information sharing were essential to offering guidance to grantees and dealing with mountains of uncertainty. MCEF was attuned to what was going on at the local, state, and federal levels through their associations with groups and individuals well-placed in these sectors. In a period of shifting information and continuing uncertainty, Massachusetts non-profits and their constituents were well-served by MCEF.

Grantees noted how they were grateful for the willingness of organizations like the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights to share knowledge. This sharing was a vital manifestation of the collaborative approach upon which the initiative was in part intentionally constructed.

Convenings

MCEF hosted two convenings in Framingham and a virtual gathering once pandemic restrictions began. These trainings received high praise from grantees who identified the value of the convenings in practical ways. They appreciated the sharing of information about the 2020 Census, website, evaluation, and introduction to fellow grantees, and valued opportunities to network and strategize with like-minded organizations. A sense of camaraderie and purpose was nurtured at these meetings which furthered the model of collaborative structures and joint action.

The pandemic magnified the challenges of census outreach. Grantees were also supported by MCEF in building their infrastructure for collaborations among grassroots organizations, and individual organizations themselves used the resources from MCEF and other partners in the ecosystem to build out their own infrastructure, training, staffing, and more. Grantees reported expanding their outreach areas, forming new networks and partnerships, and increasing their technological capacities. Many continue to use what was built from the Census work in additional civic engagement efforts, like redistricting.
Overview

The pandemic forced grantees to rapidly change their plans for census outreach and assistance. Overall, the grantees did a remarkable job of carrying on with outreach and adapted quickly to the realities of the pandemic. Most conducted Census-related activities in whatever ways they could, and many did so concurrently as they addressed clients’ emergency needs.

The grantees were an extremely diverse group of 85 non-profit organizations around the state including direct service providers, organizations, community action agencies, community development corporations, advocacy groups, legal aid organizations, regional planning agencies, and religious networking groups. They varied greatly in size, both in terms of staffing and constituents. They included local, regional and statewide organizations that served low-income people, immigrants, refugees, children, elderly, LGBTQ persons, disabled, homeless, English limited speakers, rural, and other hard-to-count populations. Grantees conducted outreach in numerous languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Khmer, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, Kiswahili, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, and K’iche, and by a vast array of innovative and unforeseen methods.

Challenges & Responses

Overwhelmingly the biggest challenges were effects of the pandemic. Grantees had to restrict or abandon in-person outreach, which is always extremely important in reaching hard-to-count populations.

In addition, people were preoccupied with issues such as unemployment, paying for rent and food, and illness or death. Distrust of the federal government and of strangers were overarching themes as well. There was continuing confusion around the census including how to answer and what it is for.

The digital divide made it difficult to reach clients and for clients to use computers and/or navigate the internet to complete their census form.

Grantees often had to completely change their outreach plans due to the pandemic, particularly during the early months of spring 2020. The major switch was from in-person outreach to digital and social media, and phone. Non-English language proficient residents also required additional attention.
As a response, many of Census efforts were paired with pandemic related aid, usually at food distribution sites and or at COVID-19 testing sites. Grantees were able to help clients deal with immediate survival needs, and include a census message in addition. Although most organizations were able to succeed, a few experienced staff loss or health preoccupation, and had to curtail their census-related work.

**Public Concerns**

Grantees reported that the most common concerns raised by the public were about privacy issues. These included general concerns about confidentiality and how the information is utilized as well as specific concerns about risks for undocumented people and whether, for example, landlords could find out how many people were living in a household.

> “Without people’s trust we wouldn’t be able to break myths about Census data being used against people... clients trusted us to provide them with accurate and honest information.”

Clearly given the climate of mistrust, trusted colleagues from community organizations played critical roles in attempting to calm nerves and reassure concerned residents.

The second most common concern were about the census itself including how to respond to the questionnaire, especially in the new online environment. There was also considerable confusion about the difference between the city and federal census.
Meaningful collaborations and enhanced networks
What We Accomplished

Many grantees indicated that they were satisfied or pleased with their census outreach despite the challenges they faced. We applaud their pride in a job well-done and concur with their positive assessment.

“Because of our Census work [we] were able to formalize relationships with sister organizations in Chelsea and Everett. We anticipate maintaining these organizational relationships beyond the census.”

– Women Encouraging Empowerment and Revere Youth in Action, Revere

The design of the collaborative framework for the MCEF had the objective in part of nurturing relationships among partners to further the census work and perhaps useful cooperation on other areas of mutual concern. Clearly this was an outcome that was achieved for many organizations involved in this initiative and with positive prospects for ongoing or future collaborations.
$1.5M Raised

$1M Awarded to the community
MCEF Grantees in Action
您填了人口普查问卷吗？

联邦政府的人口普查員現已開始敲門拜訪，幫助那些還沒有完成人口普查問卷的人士填寫普查問卷。

如何識別人口普查員？

- 普查人員都會攜帶政府頒發的官方徽章，徽章上有他們的姓名、照片、美國人口普查局水印和到期日。
- 人口普查調查員攜帶有人口普查局徽標的官方包袋、手提電腦或手提電話。
- 人口普查調查員登門拜訪時間:上午9:00至晚上9:00。

如果確認上門的人士是否人口普查局的員工，您可以聯絡1-800-991-2520，辦公時間星期一至五早上8時至下午5時。

人口普查調查員只會詢問問卷上顯示的問題：地址、電話號碼、居住在您家中的人數、您是租戶還是屋主，以及有關每個住戶的基本信息（姓名、年齡、出生日期、性別、與您的關係、種族、民族）。

如普查人員要求您提供個人身份、駕照、社會安全號碼、信用卡、銀行或其他財務信息、金錢或捐贈、PIN碼或密碼，請勿提供。
Self-Response Rates

The federal extension to respond to the census ended by October 16th, and the overall self-response rate for the U.S. slightly increased from 66.5% in 2010 to 67% in 2020.

The response rate for the state’s seven largest cities, however, all declined, and the rates for the three largest cities, Boston, Worcester and Springfield all declined by more than 8%.

2020 U.S Census Self Response Rates by Tract for MA

The change in response rates from 2010 to 2020 for municipalities as well as for census tracts varied widely. There are a myriad of factors to consider when comparing response rates from 2010 to 2020, including changing demographics, and effects of the pandemic that are beyond the scope of this report.

Legend

City/Town boundary
Census tract boundary
City with population > 75,000

2020 Census response rate (%)

N/A
Below 62%
62% - 75%
Above 75%

* 21 census tracts have no census response rate.
Decimals rounded to the nearest digit.

Created by Sajani Kandel; PhD Student, School for the Environment, UMass Boston.

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Success in Quincy

Despite the substantial challenges confronting census enumeration for the 2020 Census, Quincy improved its overall census response rate by 2.1% from 68.1% in 2010 to 69.5% in 2020. Looking at the 23 Census tracts in Quincy, an impressive 17 increased their response rates, and 13 of those improved by 5% or more.

The MCEF grantees in Quincy included Quincy Asian Resources, Inc., Quincy Community Action Programs, Vietnamese American Initiative for Development, Inc., and Council on American-Islamic Relations. With their collaborative focus on improving the count among immigrants and communities of color, we believe that these populations will be well-represented in the final Census numbers.
Recommendations & Learnings

MCEF proved to be an outstanding and effective mechanism to facilitate efforts to improve responses from hard to count constituents in Massachusetts. We learned the following:

1. The role of a statewide convener is critical. Through facilitation, networking, information and tool sharing, and team building convenings are necessary and widely popular.

2. Funding established organizations with grassroots constituencies whose Census work builds upon their other work is very effective. Successful outreach to hard to count communities relies heavily on trust and relationships. Organizations active with specific communities are the most trusted and qualified to conduct Census education and outreach.

3. Advocacy and Collaboration with government entities is important. Both the legislative and executive branches in state government need to be engaged in this process for education and to ensure resources are made available to communities. MCEF might carefully explore the possibility of including a representative from the legislature and/or the Secretary of State’s office to the Working Group in 2030.

4. Establishing close working relationships with local Census personnel is important, for instance, Community Partnership Specialists.

5. Recognize that one cannot begin preparation for the next decennial Census too soon. This applies to all endeavors critical to success of initiatives – planning, advocacy, training, education, fundraising, etc.

6. Facilitate shared drive usage for census information and grantee products, particularly materials in non-English languages.

7. The MCEF experience demonstrates that hiring a staff person dedicated to coordinating and implementing the Census work is essential. The coordinator must minimally be assisted by technical assistants hired in needed domains such as outreach, education, trainings advocacy, etc. Support staff should be added when a particular need may arise, for example, a specialist in internet technology.

A veteran community organizer described MCEF as “the best funders’ collaborative” she has ever worked with. Another well regarded observer considered MCEF to be “a national model.”
A special thank you to all who made this a successful initiative.
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**Funders**

Access Strategies Fund

Anonymous

Hyams Foundation

Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation

Episcopal City Mission

The Boston Foundation

The Klarman Family Foundation

The Barr Foundation

The Beveridge Foundation

MetroWest Health Foundation

Foundation for MetroWest

The Sudbury Foundation

Solidago Foundation

Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts

Schott Foundation/Opportunity Action

The Parker Foundation

Frank Reed & Margaret Jane Peters Memorial Fund

Eastern Bank

Blue Cross Blue Shield
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grantees</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Television Network of New England</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Community Development Corporation</td>
<td>Boston and Malden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BayPath Elder Services</td>
<td>Marlborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkshire Immigrant Center</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Alliance of LGBTQ+ Youth</td>
<td>Boston and Statewide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Senior Home Care</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian American Center</td>
<td>Framingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian Women’s Group</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian Worker Center</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brockton Interfaith Council</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodian American Rescue Organization</td>
<td>Fall River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association</td>
<td>Lowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verdean Association of Brockton/Immigrant Assistance Center</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cape Verdean Community UNIDO</td>
<td>Dorchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle Square Tenants Organization</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for New Americans</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Mass Agency on Aging</td>
<td>West Boylston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
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<td>Centro Las Americas, Inc.</td>
<td>Worcester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chelsea Collaborative</td>
<td>Chelsea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Progressive Association</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Life/Vida Urbana</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Mission</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition for a Better Acre</td>
<td>Lowell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition for Social Justice</td>
<td>Boston and Statewide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Economic Development Center of Southeastern Mass</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Foundation for Nantucket</td>
<td>Nantucket</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council on American-Islamic Relations, Massachusetts</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
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<td>Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative</td>
<td>Roxbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edwards Church, United Church of Christ</td>
<td>Framingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenway Community Health Center</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly House, Inc.</td>
<td>Worcester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundwork Lawrence</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center</td>
<td>Dorchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants’ Assistance Center</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation</td>
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<td>Everett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawyers for Civil Rights</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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</table>
Lowell Association for the Blind
Lowell

Lowell Community Health Center
Lowell

Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc.
Lynn

Madison Park Development Corp.
Roxbury

Martha’s Vineyard Planning Commission
Martha’s Vineyard

Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers
Cambridge

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Boston

Massachusetts Council of Churches
Boston

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance
Boston

Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Boston

Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Brockton

Metrowest Legal Services
Framingham

Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts

Neighbors United for a Better East Boston
East Boston

New American Association of Massachusetts
Lynn

New England Bangledeshi American Foundation
Cambridge

New England United 4 Justice
Dorchester

New North Citizens’ Council, Inc.
Springfield

North American Indian Center of Boston
Jamaica Plain

North Shore Community Development Corporation
Salem

OneHolyoke Community Development Corporation
Holyoke

Our Space Our Place
Boston

People Acting in Community Endeavors
New Bedford

Pioneer Valley Regional Ventures Center
Springfield

Pioneer Valley Workers Center
Northampton

Project Citizenship
Boston

Quincy Asian Resources Inc.
Quincy

Quincy Community Action Programs, Inc.
Quincy

Somali Development Center
Roxbury

South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Inc.
Framingham

Southeast Asian Coalition of Massachusetts
Leominster

Spanish American Center
Boston

Stavros Center for Independent Living
Amherst

United Way of North Central Massachusetts
Fitchburg

Valley Opportunity Council
Holyoke and Chicopee

Vietnamese American Initiative for Development, Inc.
Dorchester

Women Encouraging Empowerment
Revere

Worcester Interfaith
Worcester

YWCA Newburyport
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YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts
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Special thanks for data reporting, content editing, and design:

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