



2020 New Mexico Complete Count Commission

# Recommendations Report for 2030 Census

**SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF:**

- ▶ The Governor's Statewide Complete Count Commission (SCCC)
- ▶ The Office of the Secretary, New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration (DFA)

# RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT FOR 2030 CENSUS

## From the 2020 New Mexico Complete Count Commission

At the time of publication, the Bureau has released only initial population counts for purposes of apportionment of Congressional seats. The 2020 Census count for New Mexico is 2,117,522 people. This total is higher than initial estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau for the resident population of New Mexico. Based on this data, the efforts described in this report led to Census participation that exceeded expectations despite significant challenges. Additionally, New Mexico outperformed neighboring states of Arizona, Colorado, and Texas in overall Census participation (estimated population vs. actual). Further information about demographic- and geographic-specific details about the state's final population count was not yet available before the publication of this report. However, with this initial release of data, the New Mexico Complete Count Commission is cautiously optimistic that the 2020 Census counted all New Mexico residents.

While the Census itself is the responsibility of the federal government, local and state governments have a vested interest in supporting these efforts to ensure their communities are fairly and accurately counted. It was to this end that the Commission was established and operated during the 2020 Census as a statewide, cross-sector, multi-year collaboration.

### About the Recommendations Report

This is a companion report to the New Mexico Complete Count Commission's 2020 Census Final Report, which documents the activities, challenges, and successes of promoting Census participation during the 2020 Census.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the work done by the Commission during the 2020 Census, we believe that advocates statewide are better equipped to prepare for the 2030 Census. In this report are the Commission's recommendations for 2030 Census advocacy in the state. The information herein was collected from Subcommittees, Local Complete Count Committees, media and outreach partners, nonprofits, and state agencies.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Start early.
2. Invest in accurate addresses.
3. Address internet access and computer literacy issues.
4. Create a core campaign and resource infrastructure.
5. Use community-centered outreach strategies to educate residents.
6. Encourage cross-sector and multi-county partnerships.
7. Cultivate positive relationships with Bureau staff at all levels.

<sup>1</sup> New Mexico Complete Count Commission 2020 Census Final Report is available at [www.nmdfa.state.nm.us](http://www.nmdfa.state.nm.us).

## 1. START EARLY.

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*"Whomever is Governor in 2027 should begin mobilizing this effort immediately."*

— Data Subcommittee

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*"The effort for the 2030 Census cannot start too early."*

— Los Alamos Complete Count Committee

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*"Engage in tribal collaboration no later than 3 years prior to the 2030 Census and develop/co-draft a joint state-tribal plan together very early."*

— Tribal Representatives Subcommittee

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*"Working with the State Demographer, we put together private and public funding of \$363,500 for the Local Update of Census Address (LUCA) program that identified 100,000 addresses in hard-to-count areas that were missing from the U.S. Census Bureau's files. The Bureau added 63,000 of those addresses to its files. If all addresses were counted, it could garner billions more federal dollars to New Mexico, especially in traditionally undercounted communities."*

— Charitable Funders Subcommittee

### *Provide early support and financial investments.*

Given that the Census is a decennial effort, it's critical that the momentum leading up to the 2030 Census starts early and intentionally. By providing state funding in the years leading up to the Census, traditional advertising efforts and grassroots campaigns will be able to start earlier and coordinate more effectively. Cities and municipalities will also have the appropriate time to engage in grant agreements and procurement processes leading up to active outreach.

### *Build coalitions and partnerships in preparation for Census outreach.*

Partnerships between public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors should begin years advance to connect resources, people, and organizations. The rapid coalition building was successful largely due to partnerships that had already been established outside of the state's involvement and the post-COVID shift to digital formats which allowed Complete Count Committees to connect digitally with one another, with nonprofit groups, and with the Commission. These partnerships proved critical and helpful on many fronts.

### *Develop a state-tribal partnership and plan.*

Early engagement and collaboration between state and tribal governments is essential. By establishing an actionable plan early on, the Commission and its partners will be well-suited to acknowledge and address the challenges that Native Americans face to filling out the Census. This collaboration should also include Native-led or Native serving organizations connected to the urban Native community.

## 2. INVEST IN ACCURATE ADDRESSES.

### *Fund the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program.*

Accurate and up-to-date addresses matter. Investing in updating Census addresses in the years prior is critical to set the state and the Census Bureau up for success in reaching and counting residents in all households. It is important that tribal governments and urban Native organizations are involved in the LUCA program to ensure Census maps are updated and ensure follow-up by the Census Bureau to reflect these updates.

### *Invest in an improved state address file.*

Alternatively, the state could invest in an improved state address file built

around the E911 database that is maintained to a high level of accuracy in perpetuity. This database currently needs improvement in some counties and could be improved with data from other state address records.

### 3. ADDRESS INTERNET ACCESS AND COMPUTER LITERACY ISSUES.

#### *Prepare for more reliance on online participation from the Bureau.*

Requesting that households respond online is a cost-effective way for the Bureau to collect responses. It would be wise to anticipate that the Bureau will increase its encouragement to respond online rather than by paper or by phone. The state should be prepared to address this barrier across the state with a specific focus on rural, tribal, low-income, and senior communities.

#### *Increase broadband access.*

The 2020 Census was the first time the Census was offered online. For New Mexico, this was a significant barrier to ensuring that residents were counted. Increasing broadband access would help ensure that more households are able to respond online. This is especially critical in Update Leave areas, which make up about 18% of New Mexico households versus only about 5% of the national population.

#### *Support computer literacy programs.*

Computer literacy is the second step after broadband access to ensuring that community members can respond online. After an area has internet access, some residents will be able to use a computer or tablet on a daily basis for the first time. Educating them how to use it, what they have access to, and how to troubleshoot problems will help with Census participation as well as other civic duties and daily activities.

### 4. CREATE A CORE CAMPAIGN AND RESOURCE INFRASTRUCTURE.

#### *Conduct statewide message testing.*

Two years before active Census outreach, New Mexico-specific message testing should be conducted to understand what messages will be best for New Mexico's residents. That information should then be distilled down into key findings and recommended messaging and shared with anyone involved in Census outreach efforts.

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*"Rural populations are traditionally difficult to count, and even more so during a pandemic... Improving access to broadband infrastructure could help deliver improved rural response rates for the 2030 Census."*

— Rural Communities Outreach Subcommittee

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*"The message testing funded by NM Counts 2020 Funders group set a critical foundation to the success of the whole campaign."*

— Media and Messaging Subcommittee

### *Develop one statewide campaign for all Census outreach.*

It is from the message testing that the state should create a core campaign, develop a campaign plan, and create outreach materials. For ease of public engagement, having one clear campaign identity that all major outreach efforts use is recommended. To the resident, it doesn't matter if the commercial they're watching or pamphlet they're reading was funded by the state, by philanthropy, or by a business. Having all efforts externally housed under one campaign identity will help make outreach clear for the public.

### *Establish Complete Count Committees and provide guidelines and professional training.*

Having a Complete Count Committee in 33 counties and 23 Tribes and Pueblos was a phenomenal success. In 2030, there should be more parameters around who should be on the CCC and guidelines to core activities.

Many state agencies and Complete Count Committees recommended having a staff member or contractor dedicated to the Census rather than fitting in this outreach into their current staff capacity. The state should provide Complete Count Committees and others with professional communications and campaign training prior to active outreach. Getting active members on the same page about best practices, resources, and tools to help them expand outreach efforts in their local area will be helpful to an effective campaign across the whole state. Doing this early on, will also give them time to develop a place-based outreach plan.

Additionally, make becoming a Census Enumerator a requirement for a certain percentage of each Complete Count Committee. These individuals are going to be leading outreach efforts in their local communities and will encounter residents on a regular basis. In order to legally help residents complete their Census on the spot, the CCC members need to be a Census enumerator who was hired and trained by the Bureau.

### *Create and share recommended outreach plans and materials.*

During the 2020 Census, Complete Count Committees had autonomy to create their own local outreach plan. For the 2030 Census, it is recommended that the state provide a general outreach plan that the CCCs can use as a starting point for their work. Then, CCCs can adjust the plan based on local opportunities and ideas specific to reach the residents in their areas.

Just like the findings from the message testing, all outreach materials should be made available to anyone involved in Census efforts leading up to active outreach. Whenever possible, materials should be editable so that CCCs can adapt them to their local community.

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*"I would recommend that counties do term hires or hire contractors with campaign outreach experience as opposed to relying on staff with pre-existing job responsibilities and little experience with this level of outreach."*

— Taos County Complete Count Committee

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*“Attending the Statewide CCC meetings both in person and later via Webex were helpful. Consistent attendance made all the difference because of the networking and ability to remain informed about initiatives, particularly once things began changing after COVID-19.”*

— McKinley County Complete Count Committee

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*“The work of ‘trusted messengers’ is critical in a state like New Mexico, where there is a history of broken trust and misconceptions about the role of the federal government, specifically as it relates to the Census and aligned funding.”*

— Children, Students, Youth, & Education Subcommittee

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*“Ensure that the funding for the Census is placed with the proper organizations that are on the ground getting the work done.”*

— Minority & Underrepresented Communities Subcommittee

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*“A population primed to complete the Census will have a much higher turnout, especially early, if they are ready, primed, and understanding of its importance.”*

— Rio Arriba Complete Count Committee

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*“Mobile Assistance Centers required portable electronics such as laptops and tablets to access the internet via cell phone hotspots, as public Wi-Fi access is non-existent in southeast New Mexico. Our local AT&T store assisted us with this matter numerous times, at no cost”*

— Chaves County Complete Count Committee

## *Stay connected and informed.*

Regular meetings and newsletters proved useful to updating the broad network of Census partners on any adjustments enacted by the bureau, new ideas, and troubleshooting local issues together. This will be an important element to keep in place during the 2030 Census.

## 5. USE COMMUNITY-CENTERED OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO EDUCATE RESIDENTS.

### *Use trusted messengers.*

Partnerships with trusted messengers in local communities was extremely valuable to encouraging residents to respond to the Census. Using local celebrities, radio show hosts, educators, fire fighters, nurses, and more is an effective way to show that the Census matters in every community.

### *Leverage established community-based partnerships.*

Similar to trusted messengers, community-based organizations and partnerships were beneficial to share information; educate residents; and address misconceptions, misinformation, and mistrust toward the Census. By funding outreach through CBOs and giving them talking points and information about the Census, they can have direct conversations with residents.

### *Educate the public about the Census on an ongoing basis.*

Since this is a decennial Census, most of the public is unaware of its importance in our lives, what it does, and who should be counted. Incorporating curriculum about the Census in schools on a more regular basis will help inform the next generation of residents who will fill out the 2030 Census for the first time.

## 6. ENCOURAGE CROSS-SECTOR AND MULTI-COUNTY PARTNERSHIPS.

### *Leverage cross-sector partnerships on the state and local levels.*

The Census provides a unique opportunity to pull in everyone from the nonprofit, private, philanthropic, and public sectors to make sure every resident is counted. Leverage cross-sector partnerships as much as possible to prevent overlap or gaps in outreach. On the state level, having a holistic view of the activities going on was helpful to being able to adapt quickly and effectively. On the community level, these partnerships proved useful for direct outreach and connections to residents during daily activities.

### *Develop multi-county strategies.*

Media entities, save for social and digital media entities, do not follow county lines so there will be inevitable campaign overlap. To reduce the likelihood of a resident seeing multiple campaigns, which can be confusing and cause message fatigue, counties should work together to come up with regional campaigns and media materials. This will also prevent duplications in media spending so that budgets can be spent on other outreach strategies. Beyond media buying and placement, the need for multi-count strategies extends to grassroots efforts for hard-to-count areas that cross county borders.

## 7. CULTIVATE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUREAU STAFF AT ALL LEVELS.

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*“Partner with Census Bureau Partnership and Operations teams to understand recruitment goals, methodology, timeline, questionnaire, and nuance of each operation.”*

— Tribal Representatives Subcommittee

### *Help promote hiring local Census Enumerators.*

In addition to requiring that CCC members become Census enumerators, one of the best ways the Commission should also create a recruitment campaign with local messaging and imagery for residents to become Census Enumerators. People are far more likely to get counted if the person knocking on their door is from their community, or even someone they know. The Bureau is solely responsible for hiring and training these enumerators; however it is of the utmost importance that the Commission help with recruitment so that the Bureau reaches their local hiring goals. These enumerators should also be given local talking points to address specific concerns that New Mexico’s residents may have before completing their Census.

### *Meet regularly with Bureau staff.*

Ensure the Commission has a dedicated staff member to invite to meetings to provide updates from the Bureau. During the 2020 Census, activities were adjusting constantly, at times even on an hourly basis. Having access to up-to-date information from a dedicated Bureau representative was helpful. The Commission’s media team also had a constructive relationship with the Bureau’s media team and were better able to navigate the overlapping media landscape and campaigns.