

2010 Census¹: Challenges and Concerns

What Ethnic Media Need to Know

In 2010, the U.S. census will define who we are as a nation, but getting an accurate count presents many challenges. The 1990 census count disproportionately missed ethnic minorities, children and immigrants, and due to cultural and linguistic barriers Asian Americans were among those missed the most. With assistance from organizations like the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), the Census Bureau was able to improve its count of the American population for Census 2000. However, many of the same communities still had higher levels of undercounting.

Census 2010 will provide the U.S. Census Bureau with even more challenges in achieving an accurate count. The demographics of 2010 have changed significantly from 2000, with increased growth rates of minority communities and generally high levels of mobility for many people. Additionally, natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina have displaced people from their homes and have created a more complex, less traditional sense of household for many people. It is imperative that the Census Bureau understand these community dynamics and their unique barriers to achieve an accurate count of the U.S. population.

Also, in an age of identity theft and in the wake of immigration raids and other dragnets that post-9/11 policies have created, the Census Bureau also has to account for the fact that people, particularly minorities, are fearful voluntarily providing personal information – even the most basic of information asked on the census – to the government. To get an accurate count, the Census Bureau must overcome the many obstacles created by these factors.

As we look towards Census 2010, there are many areas of improvement needed to achieve an even more accurate count of our population. Here are some of these areas:

Why are community partners and the Census Bureau's Partnership Program so important to Census 2010?

More than 140,000 leaders have been credited for helping many of the hard to count communities achieve one of the most accurate counts for Census 2000 through the Census Bureau's Partnership Program, including government, school, faith-based and other kinds of community leaders, who helped explain the importance of completing the census to their constituents. This has proven to be a great success as people are interacting with trusted leaders, rather than with a stranger representing the federal government. With a strong Partnership Program and community partners supporting Census 2010, the Census Bureau has a far greater chance to reach every U.S. resident to ensure an accurate count. This is

¹ Based on testimony by Karen K. Narasaki, president and executive director, Asian American Justice Center, before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the United States House of Representatives prepared for the Oversight Hearing on the Census Bureau's Preparations for the 2010 Decennial Census Survey on April 24, 2007. The testimony is available on AAJC's Web site, www.advancingequality.org.

(Please turn over)

particularly important in light of the Census Bureau's decision in April 2008 to scrap a plan to use wireless hand-held devices to collect information from people who do not mail back their census forms, which will have a disproportionate impact on minorities, immigrants and poor people who tend to have higher non-response rates, making it even more critical to proactively outreach to these communities.

Why is a language assistance program critical to the 2010 Census?

Lack of English fluency is a real barrier in getting many limited English proficient (LEP) persons to fill out their questionnaires, including many in the Asian American community. The Census Bureau must develop a comprehensive program that addresses the language barrier to census participation. The language assistance program must provide enough translated census materials and questionnaires early in the campaign to meet the need and demand of LEP persons. If materials and questionnaires are not produced and distributed in a timely manner, many LEP persons will fail to fill out the forms and an accurate count will not be achieved.

What challenges are associated with the Census Bureau's advertising campaign?

While the Census Bureau has invested some money in advertising for Census 2010, more money is needed in the budget for in-language advertising to target language minority communities. During the 2000 Census, the Census Bureau's advertising campaign did not reach many ethnic groups who use in-language media to get daily news and information. The 2000 campaign only targeted a small percentage of the LEP population; it failed to market to ethnic groups who have the highest LEP rates and the highest percentage of linguistically isolated households. Many Asian languages and cultures were overlooked during the campaign, and the advertising agency was forced to make generalizations across all Asian ethnicities.

Why is it important to recruit and hire minority enumerators for the Census?

It is important for the Census Bureau to ensure that the person knocking on the door for the 2010 Census look like and sound like the person answering the door. This is particularly useful in collecting complete information from immigrant respondents, where they are more likely to be mobile, have complex household arrangements and lack English-language skills, thus making them harder to count. People are more likely to respond to enumerators who share their same cultural background, language and other such factors.

How can ethnic media help ensure an accurate 2010 Census count?

To ensure a more accurate count of Asian Americans in 2000, AAJC launched a successful national community education outreach project, working with media, that helped to fill the gaps leftover from the Bureau's efforts. As Census 2010 draws near, AAJC is preparing to launch a Census 2010 campaign focused on Asian Americans that will be a part of a larger national campaign led by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

Ethnic media are trusted voices and reliable sources of information in your communities and can help deliver the 2010 census message to every corner of the nation, including areas isolated by language or geography. For example, ethnic media can share news about census efforts and include census information in broadcasts, articles and on news Web sites. AAJC will launch its 2010 census campaign later this year, and ethnic media will have access to informational materials needed to help ensure an accurate count on AAJC's Web site, www.advancingequality.org. Among other media-focused activities, AAJC will also provide regular telephonic briefings on issues related to the census, as well as produce a media kit that will include sample articles for use by ethnic media. By joining forces with AAJC, ethnic media can help to educate Asian Americans about the importance of filling out their forms and encourage them to participate in Census 2010.