

How the 2010 Census can help your borough

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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The 2010 Census is about your community's future. Over \$400 billion is distributed to local and state governments based on census data based on census data. Would life in your community be better if residents had access to new or expanded hospitals or senior centers, if children who live in the community could learn in new or improved schools, or if people could travel to their destination on better roads and bridges? As an elected or appointed official, you can increase the awareness of the need for households who live in your community to fill out and return the forms promptly.

Local government officials can play an important role in making the 2010 census successful by becoming a 2010 Census Partner. Examples include issuing a proclamation or other public endorsement of the 2010 Census, conducting a "town hall" meeting or other events to encourage census participation, or simply being available to answer questions from local citizens. A good resource is a document featuring frequently asked questions which can be found on the census website at www.2010census.gov.

The Census Form

The Census Bureau will be mailing census forms to every household between March 15 and March 17 with instructions that the forms be completed to reflect *everyone* who is living in the household on April 1. Every household in the country will be asked to respond to ten questions – four general questions about the household and six questions that relate to each household member. They include:

- If the housing unit is owned or rented
- Telephone number
- How many people live in the residence



WITH EASE The 2010 Census questionnaire is one of the shortest in history with only ten questions

- If any additional people who lived at the residence on April 1, 2010 were not included

For each household member the survey asks:

- Name and sex of household member
- Age and date of birth
- Relationship to the person who owns or rents the residence
- Whether this person is of Hispanic origin
- If this person sometimes lives or stays elsewhere

With only ten questions, the 2010 Census questionnaire is one of the shortest questionnaires in history and should take just ten minutes to complete.

Residents of your community may express concern about the confidentiality of the information, or even why certain information is requested. For example, why does the census need your telephone number? The census may need to clarify some of the responses and the easiest way to do this is with a phone call – without having to send a census worker to the resident's

home. Some question why the Census Bureau asks about race and Hispanic origin. Information on race is used to meet legislative districting principles as well as to assess racial differences in health and environmental risks.

Municipal officials may also wonder, or be asked the question if the information is shared with federal immigration officers, the Internal Revenue Service or any other government agencies. By law, the Census Bureau *cannot* share any individuals' personal information with anyone or any agency.

One of the frequently asked questions is what happens if a household does not respond. Although federal law does make it a crime not to return the census form and courts may impose a fine of up to \$5,000 for failure to respond, the Census Bureau views this approach as a last resort. Municipal officials can encourage the return of the completed form by explaining the importance of the questions asked and how the information could benefit their community.



USEFUL INDICATORS Comparing census data can help build a community or neighborhood assessment model

Households That Need to Return the Form

People who live in mobile homes, apartments, a room or group of rooms where people live or stay at this address should return the census form, as well as people who own their home. (A postage paid envelope is provided by the Census Bureau.)

If a housing unit is vacant on Census Day (April 1), a form will not need to be returned. The landlord should not return the form based on information about the previous household and should simply ignore any letters or forms in the mail addressed to the previous household. Instead a census worker will visit the address to verify that it is vacant. Households that get the form in March but will be leaving the address by April 1 should also ignore the form.

Municipalities with colleges should be especially motivated to encourage college students who live in on-campus or off-campus housing to fill out the form because they are counted in the municipality

where they live, rather than parent's home. As a general rule, people who are retired and may be vacationing from home for extended periods should fill out the form to reflect the residence in which they live most of the time. Another situation relates to communities with military installations. U.S. military personnel living in the barracks of a military installation are counted as part of the barracks population. However, those who live on base or off-base, but not in the barracks are counted in the residence where they live most of the time. Finally, U.S. military personnel living overseas are counted by the military.

Benchmarking Your Community

Municipalities will find that the census information is very helpful in identifying trends from one decade to another that may tell elected and appointed officials something about the way the community is changing, for good or perhaps in a negative way. While the results of the census may not be released until 2011, now is a good time to develop a tool to assess

how well your community is doing from a community development standpoint. The idea is to spot trends that may reflect the success of past and current community efforts or the need to put into place timely strategies for dealing with emerging problems.

This task may not require much, if any, staff time. A local college or university may be very interested in collaborating with your borough on this project to provide students with a "real world" experience. Keep in mind that spotting trends will require that data be mined from the 2000 Census and perhaps earlier censuses to compare with the 2010 data. So the project can be undertaken in four phases: 1) developing a census data based community development assessment tool or model; 2) extracting data from the 2000 and earlier censuses for relevant information items; 3) extracting 2010 data when it becomes available and finally, 4) preparing a report that summarizes trends and suggests strategies for addressing negative trends. A local college professor who is interested in service learning should find this project intriguing.

Population and Housing Data

The census has two different kinds of data: population and housing. The starting point in building a community or neighborhood assessment model is to decide which data may be able to tell a story about what is happening in your community. For example, if owner-occupied housing in your community declines from 2000 to 2010 from 70 percent to 60 percent, what does this mean? If housing vacancy rates go up from 3 percent to 7 percent what is causing this growing problem and how should it be addressed? Arguably, the most relevant housing data in the census is the percentage of

owner/renter occupied housing units and the percentage of vacant housing units. These two data items should probably be included in your community development assessment tool. Housing values, adjusted for inflation, are another useful housing indicator from the census. Some of this information will come from American Community Survey which collects more population and housing information from a sample of the population on an annual basis.

Population data you may want to consider comparing from one census to another would include percentage of seniors (65+) and percentage of households with children. One of the interesting trends reflected in the 2000 census was the increase in the number and percentage of households with children who live in boroughs and the decline in the number and percentage of senior citizen households. While this seems counter to the trend in Pennsylvania as a whole, there is speculation that there is a reverse trend in many boroughs and core communities because of the availability of more modestly priced entry level housing. If this trend is true for your borough, you may need to evaluate what this will mean in terms of upgraded/enhanced facilities and services required by younger families, such as parks and playgrounds.

Other population data that you would probably want to extract from the 2010 Census could include median income per household, total households and persons living below the poverty line. If the increase in household income is lagging behind the state or region as a whole, this could mean that economic development initiatives, including business and work force development, need enhanced or refocused.

	1990	2000 COMPARISON	2010 COMPARISON
POPULATION DATA		1990-2000	2000-2010
POPULATION	18419	17970 -2.4%	TBD
HOUSEHOLDS	7253	7426 +2.4%	TBD
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE (PERSONS)	2.53	2.42 -.09	TBD
HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN	1914	1,728 -10%	TBD
PERSONS 65+	3283	3,200 -2.5%	TBD
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$26,151	33,969 +30%	TBD
POVERTY RATE (PERSONS)	9.80%	14% +43%	TBD
HOUSING DATA			
HOUSING UNITS	7690	8032 +4%	TBD
VACANCY RATE (%)	6.00%	7.50% +25%	TBD
OWNER OCCUPIED (%)	58%	49.00% -16%	TBD
MEDIAN VALUE (\$)	\$77,900	\$104,000 +34%	TBD

THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATIONS A sample template for a community or neighborhood assessment, with hypothetical data – what information could your borough best put to use?

Summarizing the Census Data

When your community has decided which data items to track, it is possible to scale and weigh each data item. For example, you may feel that certain data items are more important than others and you would assign points accordingly. This exercise could be useful if you want to compare different census tracts within the community to see, relatively speaking, how they compare to one another. This comparative analysis between different areas of the community could be useful in seeking federal and state funding which, more and more, emphasize the need to target public funds to areas most in need.

The Need for Community Involvement

The last phase of this exercise should include the sharing of information with a steering committee of people including elected and appointed officials, residents, business people and other community stakeholders. The steering committee should be charged with helping municipal officials interpret the data and with developing strategies for addressing emerging community needs. If a local college is involved, they would certainly be included

as a stakeholder. If the project is a partnership between the college and community, a final report would be prepared by the college students (under the supervision of a professor) summarizing the data, interpreting the data and describing strategies to effectively address any growing community development needs.

Conclusion

The 2010 Census is a real opportunity for municipalities to make sure all residents are counted. In doing so, they will be maximizing the amount of federal funding that their community can eventually receive for important local projects. Also, with dwindling state resources, highly competitive federal grants and tighter municipal budgets, it is also imperative for communities to demonstrate that they are thinking smarter and more strategically about community development. The comparison of census data over a period of time for key indicators will help a community assess if past and current programs are succeeding and/or if there is a need to ratchet-up planning and implementation to meet emerging community development needs. **(B)**