

## *Frequently asked questions*

### **Who is counted?**

- The census counts every person who lives in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico and Guam.
- The census counts both citizens and non-citizens, including undocumented immigrants.
- Even those people who don't have traditional "homes" are counted, such as people who are homeless, prison inmates, and residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities.
- Military personnel and federal civilian government employees, as well as their dependents, who are stationed overseas are counted as part of the "overseas population," for purposes of congressional apportionment only.

### **When is the census conducted?**

- The Constitution requires that a census be taken every ten years. We have had 22 censuses so far, starting in 1790.
- The next census will take place in 2010.
- Although the census provides a snapshot of the population on one day, the U.S. Census Bureau will work throughout the year to make sure everyone is counted.

### **How is each household counted?**

- Census questionnaires will be mailed to most U.S. households in March 2010, and people will be asked to provide information that is accurate as of April 1, 2010.
- Census workers visit some addresses in remote and rural areas, to verify the location and drop off a questionnaire.
- Households that do not respond by mail will be sent a second form.
- Census takers will visit households that do not respond to the second form, to collect the household's information, or determine if an address is vacant. Census takers may return up to six times to make sure a household is included in the count.
- People are counted at the location where they live and sleep most of the time.

### **How do I complete the form?**

- The census form is easy to complete and takes less than 10 minutes to fill out. The questionnaire asks only a few simple questions for each person in the household: name, relationship, gender, age and date of birth, race, and whether the respondent owns or rents his or her home. The census does **not** ask about a person's immigration status.
- In areas where there are likely to be a large number of Spanish speakers, the census form will be bilingual in English and Spanish.
- You can call a phone number on the back of the English form to request a questionnaire in Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, or Russian.
- Federal law requires that everyone participate in the census - you cannot "opt out."

### **What happens to the information?**

- The information on your census form is **completely confidential**, as mandated by federal law, and cannot be disclosed for 72 years. Only aggregate statistics, providing a profile of our population and housing, are published.

- The Census Bureau does not share your personal information with courts, the police, or other federal departments such as the Internal Revenue Service and Department of Homeland Security.
- All Census Bureau employees have taken a lifetime oath to protect confidentiality and if they violate this oath, face prison time, a hefty fine, or both.

#### **What are census data used for?**

- Census data directly affect how almost \$400 billion per year in federal funding is allocated to communities for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and much more. That's more than \$4 trillion over a 10-year period.
- States allocate billions of dollars of their own funds to localities and nonprofit organizations using census data.
- Census data are used to redistribute Congressional seats to each state based on population and to draw state legislative districts.
- The census is like a snapshot that helps define who we are as a nation. Data about changes in your community are crucial to many planning decisions, such as where to provide services for the elderly, where to build new roads and schools, or where to locate job training centers.

#### **Why is the census an important civil rights issue?**

Census data directly affect decisions on a great number of matters of national and local importance, including education, employment, veterans' services, public health care, rural development, redistricting, the environment, transportation, housing, and the enforcement of civil rights laws.

Despite more resources and better planning, the 2000 census missed an estimated 16 million people and double-counted nearly 18 million more. Low-income communities, particularly low-income communities of color, were disproportionately undercounted in the census. As a result, many individuals were denied an equal voice in their government (since legislative districts are drawn based on decennial census data), and many communities were shortchanged on federal and state funding for schools, crime prevention, health care, and transportation.

An accurate census directly affects our nation's ability to ensure equal representation and equal access to important governmental resources for all Americans, and thus must be regarded as one of the most significant civil rights issues facing the country today.

#### **Why are people of color and low-income people disproportionately undercounted?**

There are several reasons for the persistent and disproportionate undercount of people of color and low-income people, including:

- lower response rates for mail and door-to-door collection methods in lower-income areas;
- lower education levels, illiteracy, and difficulty with the English language, affecting the ability of many individuals to understand the census;
- a general misunderstanding of the importance of census participation in these communities; and,
- distrust or suspicion of government, leading to a fear that census responses may be used by immigration or law enforcement officials to deport or incarcerate or may disqualify one for social welfare programs.

Low-income people, people of color, children, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people living in urban areas are most likely to be undercounted. In contrast, college

students living away from home, people who own more than one home, non-Hispanic Whites, suburban residents, and higher-income people are more likely to be counted twice, leading to an overcount of these population groups.

**What is the relationship of the Census to voting rights?**

Census data are used for redistricting, or determining representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, school boards, and city councils. Census information is used to enforce the Voting Rights Act (VRA), which outlaws gerrymandering of legislative districts with the intention of diluting the concentration of minority voters. Failing to accurately account for local concentrations of minority groups in a census count hampers fair redistricting efforts since voting power would not be properly allocated on the basis of population. VRA provisions requiring in-language ballot and voting assistance in limited English proficiency communities also rely on census data collected through the American Community Survey.