

2021

Anchor Institutions Task Force Publications

Evaluation of an Anchor Institution- City-
Community Partnership to Improve
Census Enumeration in Philadelphia

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Anchor Institutions Task Force



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Abstract

A complete 2020 Census count is critical to ensure the appropriate allocation of federal funding that is vital to under-resourced communities. However, little is known regarding the best practices to promote thorough Census enumeration. The Census 2020 Census Champion program was developed to train volunteers from anchor institutions and the community to be knowledgeable Census advocates when targeting historically undercounted populations (Census Counts, 2020). The purpose of this article is to present an evaluation of the Census Champion training program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, and to describe how the Census support provided by the School of Nursing shifted due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The University of Pennsylvania is grounded in an ethos of democratic action and civic engagement. The Penn School of Nursing student-run community service group, Community Champions, collaborated with PhillyCounts, the government office overseeing Philadelphia Census enumeration, to host the Census Champion training. Post-training evaluation data highlighted the informative nature of the program and attendees' motivation to discuss the Census with the historically undercounted communities they serve. As the restrictions posed by COVID-19 required PhillyCounts to pivot their in-person Census outreach to phone banking, the School of Nursing met the needs of PhillyCounts by

providing a student volunteer workforce to make targeted Census completion reminder calls and provide social needs assessment to marginalized, high risk community members. An anchor institutions-city-community partnership that focused on civic engagement, and trained students about communication strategies to engage their surrounding community in civic engagement, shows great promise. Future research is needed to further evaluate the impact of anchor institution-city- community partnerships directed at civic engagement.

Key Words

Civic engagement, Census engagement, Anchor institutions, nursing education, community engagement

Significance

The decennial Census is an invaluable tool that drives America's political and financial-spending decision-making (O'Hare, 2019). However, many of the populations that would benefit most from appropriately allocated social services have been historically undercounted (Strane & Griffis, 2018), including almost six hundred thousand people experiencing homelessness (Wilson et al., 2017; US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019), one million children under the age of five- especially those living in poverty (O'Hare et al., 2020), and almost four million of all Black or Hispanic Americans (Elliott et al., 2019). An accurate 2020 Census is particularly important for Philadelphia,

the city with the highest rate of poverty of the 10 largest US cities (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2017). Over a third (35%) of Pennsylvania's households that are at risk for being undercounted, are in Philadelphia (Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia, 2017). Each person in Philadelphia who is omitted from enumeration could cost the city \$21,000 in federal spending over the next decade (McCrorey, n.d.). The loss of funds could be devastating for a city in which 26% of its residents are living in poverty and over half (58%) of residents utilize federal insurance programs (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, n.d.; Pew Charitable Trusts, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

Background

Despite the importance of the Census for political decision-making, surprisingly little is known about the best practices to promote an accurate count. The research is inconclusive regarding the reasons for the reluctance of many to complete the Census. Mistrust regarding data confidentiality and how the information is used, lack of knowledge about the Census, or confusion about completing the Census are frequently cited barriers (Evans et al., 2019; O'Hare, 2019; Robinson et al., n.d.). Survey response literature proposes several theories as to the decision to participate in surveys. Research suggests that emphasizing the survey's value to the individual, and utilizing trusted sources of information are persuasive features (National Research Council, 2013). Evaluation data demonstrated that the Census should 1) provide assurances about the data safety and confidentiality, especially for those who may mistrust the government, and 2) promote community awareness about the purpose, content,

process and value of the Census. Community engagement can be a critical tool for enacting these recommendations (Evans et al., 2019; McGeeney et al., 2019).

Increasingly, anchor institutions, defined as enduring organizations rooted in their localities, are urged to have their work informed by an ethos of reciprocity and social responsibility that "imbue[s] their institutions with the spirit of democracy and a commitment to building a better, more just and equitable society" (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Taylor et al., 2013). However, there are often challenges for anchor institutions to engage in their communities. Anchor institutions of higher education often miscalculate the cost-benefit analysis to community engagement by overestimating the costs and underestimating the benefits to community engagement (Harris, 2019; Webber & Karlström, 2009). Conversely, a report by Harkavy and others (2009), stated that colleges, universities, medical centers, and other local anchor institutions are increasingly important to local economies.

Utilizing established academic-community partnerships is a pathway for expanding Census outreach to hard-to-count individuals, and ensuring equitable distribution of federal funding to the respective communities in which anchor institutions are located. Anchor institution-community partnerships provide community organizations with the necessary human capital, resources, and support to engage effectively with community members (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Worrall, 2007). In turn, these additional resources support the ability of community organizations to increase the number of services and community members reached (Hausman-Cohen et al., 2020).

The Census 2020 Census Champion program was developed to train anchor institutions and community members to be knowledgeable Census advocates (Census Counts, 2020). However, there are no data describing the applicability of the training or how the program was evaluated. This purpose of this paper is to discuss 1) the attendees' evaluation of the Census Champion Training program, 2) how the program adapted due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, 3) results of the anchor institution engagement, and 4) strategies for long-term evaluation.

The Census Champion Program

The Census Champion training program was a national Census initiative to educate the public about the value of the Census. The training was designed to educate community envoys who can act as trusted messengers related to the value, safety, and role of the 2020 Census in communities, particularly as it relates to funding for the community. Trainings were carried out at a variety of organizations, including anchor institutions. Philly Counts was charged with promoting an accurate 2020 Census and led all trainings. The University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, through their commitment to social justice and civic engagement, reached out to partner with Philly Counts and host the training for nursing students, faculty and staff.

Recruitment and Evaluation

The Census Champion Training event was hosted by the School of Nursing Community Champions program, a faculty mentored, student run program designed to foster a deeper understanding of social determinants of health in the Philadelphia community through community

engagement (Mintz et al., 2017; University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, 2020). Event organizers recruited attendees with flyers and University email. At event registration, organizers obtained the attendees' school affiliation, current role, and current community engagement activities. Attendees evaluated the training anonymously and rated satisfaction with the event and its educational content using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Extremely dissatisfied, 2 – Dissatisfied, 3 – Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 4 – Satisfied, 5 – Extremely Satisfied). Attendees also documented factors that prompted their decision to attend, and their favorite aspect of the event. IRB approval for the evaluation was not required.

Results of the training program

There were 26 attendees at the 90-minute training on February 7, 2020; 10 undergraduate students, 7 graduate students, 1 recent graduate, 3 faculty, 4 staff, and one member from a community organization. Fifty-eight percent of attendees were engaged in community outreach at the time of the training.

Attendees rated the event highly in both overall satisfaction and educational content (Table 1). Most attendees commented that their favorite aspect of the Census Champion training was that it was “clear”, “comprehensive”, or “informative”. Other attendees lauded the presentation style of the Philly Counts speaker and interactive format of the training, which allowed for answering of attendees' questions as they arose.

Participants offered a range of factors that influenced their decision to attend the event, including the desire to be civically engaged, the opportunity to learn for themselves or to share

information about the Census with others (Table 2). A number of participants wanted to extol the value of the Census to their communities served by focusing on the need for an accurate count to ensure sufficient appropriation of funding for marginalized communities. Others elaborated on the value of the educational content that provided attendees with a communication strategy to assuage concerns and motivate community members to participate in the Census. Specific features of the program that were identified as valuable in transferring knowledge to their communities included strategies to address concerns regarding privacy, how the Census data would be used for funding, and the talking points regarding the enumeration process and undercounted populations.

Support for Census Outreach during COVID-19

Restrictions imposed by COVID-19 pandemic thwarted many planned in person Census community outreach efforts. Philly Counts adapted by providing phone banking to discuss the value of the Census with community members. By mid-August, 2020, only 19.2% of families in West Philadelphia (the location of the University) had completed the 2020 Census. Philly Counts created a COVID-19 virtual Community Response Captain Program (CCRCP) that educated trainees on the social services available to Philadelphia community members during the pandemic which included assistance programs for housing, food security, or preventing health conditions caused by extreme heat.

Penn Nursing led the recruitment of University of Pennsylvania student “phone bankers” to bolster Census completion August 2020 until October

2020. Nursing students, along with medical, social work and public health students, made targeted phone calls in historically hard to count areas of the city to inform community members about the value the Census and surveying community members’ social and economic needs. A total of 6377 calls were completed, connecting to 877 families. Penn Nursing Census phone bankers linked families to resources to address food access, cooling systems, internet services and employment opportunities.

Discussion

The Census Champion training was a promising opportunity to utilize anchor institution-city-community partnerships to expand Census outreach activities. After the Census education, the participants’ felt prepared to articulate the need for a complete Census count to guide the appropriate allocation of funding. The Census Champion training aligned with the survey response literature on best practices to promote survey completion—the importance of promoting the survey’s value to those who are recruited to participate (National Research Council, 2013). It was particularly promising that many of the Census Champion attendees were already engaged with the community, and were seen as trusted messengers at a variety of sites for Philadelphia’s undercounted populations, including sites that served undocumented immigrant and homeless populations. Additionally, college students as messengers facilitated counting those students living off-campus, another historically hard to count population (O’Hare, 2019). The Census Champion partnership demonstrated how a University, as a deeply connected anchor institution, was able to provide civically engaged

students as human capital. Numerous students were available to engage in the phone banking initiative that was needed for Census capacity building during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The student phone banking resulted in thousands of calls to underserved, historically undercounted families in high poverty neighborhoods surrounding the University.

To our knowledge, this is the first program evaluation of the Census Champion training or any anchor institution- city- community partnership designed to increase Census engagement. A limitation is that this evaluation lacked the follow-up data regarding the direct association between Census outreach and Census completion. The sustainability of the phone banking outreach should be evaluated as well, as the impact of COVID-19 on communities may extend for far longer than the 2020 Census enumeration process.

An anchor institutions-city-community partnership that focused on civic engagement, and trained students about communication strategies to engage their surrounding community in civic engagement, shows great promise. The University of Pennsylvania has a long history of promoting student civic engagement and is deeply committed to the ethos of connecting service-learning to the core educational and civic missions of the university (Harkavy and Hartley, 2010; Hartley and Harkavy, 2011)

The collaboration between Philly Counts and the School of Nursing spurred discussions of how to better incorporate civic engagement within the school, including the development of an internal online learning platform for students that can host

voter registration and Census education for nursing students. Discussions about civic engagement could provide opportunities for systemic change to impact communities surrounding universities. Promoting civic engagement in the communities served can provide community members with increased federal funding for a variety of important healthcare programs for low-income populations, including Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. Civic engagement has been linked to overall better self-reported health of community members (HealthyPeople.gov, n.d.; Kim et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2019). Future clinicians should be educated to incorporate civic engagement into the provision of healthcare to reduce racial and economic disparities. Successful academic – community partnerships provide community partners with evidence for the added value of universities as neighborhood anchors. The Census Champion model is being replicated by Philly Counts, with support from Penn Nursing, to provide COVID-19 information and vaccine clinic outreach to black and brown communities most deeply impacted by the pandemic (Philly Counts, 2020)

Further research should explore how anchor institution-community partnerships can support civic engagement initiatives to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between anchor institutions and their surrounding community. Additionally, evaluation of these innovative efforts and their impact on building public trust in the Census will provide useful insights on the role of University students as trusted messengers to support civic participation for historically marginalized populations.

Table 1. Results of Attendees Evaluation of Census Champion Training

	Satisfaction with Event	Satisfaction with Educational Content
Average Score (STD)	4.73 (\pm 0.44)	4.85(\pm 0.36)

Table 2. Quotes from Participants

Theme	Quotes
Decision making factor – Learn more about the Census	<p>“Interests in the topic because it is the first time I have heard [about] the Census since I came to the United States.” (Participant 105)</p> <p>“To learn more about census and how to educate community members on the census” (Participant 103)</p>
Decision making factor – Civic engagement	<p>“I work in the community (as faculty with students) and have opportunities to share the information in areas that are undercounted.” (Participant 116)</p> <p>“Representation through data is crucial for funding. And I wanted to learn how to talk to my communities about [the] Census” (Participant 114)</p> <p>“As a nursing student, I’m very interested in community engagement, and I want to use what I’ve learned to help other people!” (Participant 115)</p>
Training’s educational content perceived value	<p>“Learning about the security and protections around Census information! I hope we are able to create more trust and accurate representation!” (Participant 106)</p> <p>“Talking points on how so many are under-counted” (Participant 120)</p> <p>“All of the info about how to talk to people about why it’s so important.” (Participant 112)</p>

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