IL COUNT ME IN 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2030

PROJECT TEAM
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OVERVIEW
From 2017 to 2020, Forefront and a diverse group of partners convened a broad coalition of social impact sector organizations with the goal of ensuring a fair count for Illinois in the 2020 Census. This report shares our initial findings from Census 2020 and recommendations for a successful 2030 Census count and beyond.

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THE CENSUS is a Constitutional right and an essential tool. The Census’ data informs Federal representation and funding for essential services and allows us to properly track and understand the demographic makeup of our nation. And, every ten years, each state has the opportunity to secure a fair and accurate count.

Forefront and our allies launched IL Count Me In 2020 (ILCMI 2020) in 2017. Three years later, we had built one of the largest private/public partnerships with local and national nonprofits, foundations, government, faith-based organizations, businesses, elected offices, and more. Through collective action, digital engagement, and steadfast community leadership in the face of a global pandemic, the efforts of ILCMI 2020 resulted in Illinois’ highest national ranking in self-response in a generation.

In solidarity with our coalition partners, Forefront achieved:

- **71.4%** self-response rate in Illinois, higher than the national average of 67% and Illinois’ 70.5% rate in 2010.
- **#7** nationwide ranking in statewide self-response, versus our #19 ranking in 2010, and a rank of #1 in the top ten most populous states.
- One of the **largest private/public partnerships in the country** with 22 funders and 60+ nonprofits focused on the Census.
- An **exemplary and inclusive RFP** for pooled funding from 22 grantmakers to support Census outreach and engagement that should be the template for future Census funding.
- A **social media strategy** that created real-time results in Census response and became a nationally-recognized best practice.
- The successful passage of **two separate State Appropriations for Census support** ($1.5 million housed at the Secretary of State and $29 million housed at the Illinois Department of Human Services). This was the first time Illinois appropriated money for Census engagement.

These outcomes were accomplished as a result of ILCMI 2020 continually changing and adjusting our tactics at the local and national level. Consequently, our collaboration and relationships with our grantees, coalition partners, government, and philanthropy remained powerful and resilient. This executive summary outlines our major challenges, key insights, and shares recommendations for a successful 2030 Census in Illinois.
LEGAL, PROCEDURAL, & IDENTITY-BASED BARRIERS

THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

In spring of 2018, President Trump’s Administration proposed including a question regarding the citizenship of individuals and families filling out the Census. This question had not been included in decennial Censuses since the 1950s. While the proposal was eventually struck down by the Supreme Court, the intervening legal battles over the decision left a vacuum where misinformation and confusion grew.

CHANGES IN TIMELINE

In July 2020, President Trump’s Administration announced changes to the Census timeline and data collection process. The U.S. Census Bureau decided to move up the self-response deadline by a month to September 30, 2020. This announcement challenged the advocate community, limiting the timeline for hard-to-count Census tracts to be counted.

Towards the end of September, federal courts ruled against the shortening of the 2020 Census self-response period, but the Trump Administration appealed. In early October, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Administration, ending the self-response period at 5am Central Time on October 16.

The Census’ shifting end date was severely challenging to navigate. Importantly, the litigation on the official Census deadline caused major confusion. Our team actively partnered with national Census experts to ensure alignment and accuracy in our messaging. Following national guidance, Forefront encouraged ILCMI 2020 grantees and coalition partners to heighten the urgency of getting counted sooner, but this uncertainty compromised our final outreach efforts.

EXCLUDING UNDOCUMENTED RESIDENTS

As part of his changes to the Census timeline and data, President Trump issued an Executive Memo asking undocumented immigrants to be excluded in the final State Census count for Congressional apportionment purposes. This gave rise to the possibility of the federal government using these exclusions discriminately, rewarding certain states and punishing others by tweaking their overall populations.

This unprecedented action forced the national legal community to file numerous lawsuits against the memo. As the self-response period abruptly ended, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear one of the national lawsuits filed against the President’s Executive Memo in November.

While the Supreme Court ultimately did not rule on the legality of the memo, it was effectively undone by newly elected President Joe Biden on his first day in office through an Executive Order. The result is welcome, but the intervening months of confusion and uncertainty created further opportunities for misinformation, politicization of the Census, and a justifiable concern that Census data could benefit certain states over others.
CONNECTING AND ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The most immediate obstacle to an accurate count was the COVID-19 pandemic. To maintain and build our momentum, we moved quickly, safely, and carefully. During the statewide stay-at-home order, ILCMI 2020 grantees, steering committee members, and Illinois government partners and looked to the Forefront team for the latest updates, guidance, and resources. Our Democracy Initiative Director Anita Banerji and Associate Manager Yoselyn Ovalle ensured our grantees had the flexibility and resources to successfully activate a virtual outreach strategy.

THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION

The Trump Administration’s proposal to add a citizenship question was a persistent challenge for our grantees. A majority of grantees identified the proposed citizenship question and distrust in government as severe obstacles to participation. Even after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the citizenship question unconstitutional, the damage from this proposed question was already done.

Grantees were faced with the difficult task to regain trust and reinforce confidentiality within immigrant, refugee, non-English speaking, and Latinx communities. Confronted with misinformation about the citizenship question and continuing legal uncertainty on whether it would even be included, our partners needed to both answer their communities’ genuine fears and combat myths with factual information.

Another challenge was the lack of awareness and education about the Census. Grantees were tasked to provide that education as they engaged with historically undercounted communities. While this presented an opportunity to build relationships and trust, it was difficult to connect with communities in a purely digital world. Grantees and coalition members shared the need to continue Census education in communities beyond 2020 and find diverse ways to incorporate the Census into broader conversations around civic engagement.

While grantees remained committed to ensuring hard-to-count communities filled out the Census, there were still wide gaps in self-response rates. Distrust in government, a pandemic, and civil unrest all factored into these gaps. ILCMI 2020’s digital outreach strategy, while necessary, lacked the capacity to combat misconceptions through personal communication and embed engagement opportunities in community gatherings. Ultimately, the hardest to count areas still had low or even lower self-response rates during the data collection period. While we intended a better outcome, grantees were still appreciative of starting early and being provided funding and flexibility in their outreach efforts.
COMMUNICATING COLLABORATIVELY

CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION

Collaborative efforts proved to be highly successful, but coordination across different sectors had challenges. Weekly emails, consistent conference calls, and webinars maintained collective alignment and organization. Based on grantee feedback, these efforts, though duplicative at points, added value.

Our social media strategy relied on grassroots and large-scale online gatherings of cross-sector stakeholders using the hashtags #ILCountMeIn2020 and #MakeILCount. These social media gatherings had a significant impact on the Census self-response rate, with a 1.5% increase in self-response in the days post-gatherings. Due to the initial success of our first few campaigns, we continued them on a bi-monthly basis throughout the spring and summer of 2020, providing toolkits to support our partners as they contributed to online conversations.

Grantees faced limited staff capacity and fiscal uncertainty because of the pandemic. As such, it was challenging to schedule or post during the allotted gathering time, even with Forefront’s social media engagement toolkits. After grantees noted that a lack of non-English content limited the overall success of the gatherings, we collectively incorporated six additional languages into our ongoing resource repository.

Examples of video content shared in our bi-monthly Census social media campaigns. These virtual gatherings had a significant impact on the Census self-response rate. View the Myths and Misinformation, Disinformation, and Family-oriented videos.
In the coming months, as Census 2020 data is released, advocates will monitor the concerns about quality of the data and redistricting efforts. The purpose of this historic collaborative project was to provide our hard-to-count communities the opportunity to be counted and receive the resources, funding, and political representation they are entitled to. As a result of this important message, Illinois advocates are now better positioned to begin preparing for Census 2030. Forefront and our partners have built an inclusive network of nonprofits committed to ensuring our communities are civically engaged, informed, and counted.

Collaboration was a cornerstone value of ILCMI 2020's successful Census campaign and embedded in every aspect of this movement. This approach offers a model for organizing behind other issues such as voter protection and redistricting. The Census 2020 experience has taught us that convening civil rights, social justice, and government reform practitioners around democracy issues creates thoughtful and far-reaching policies and stronger coalitions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2030**

**CREATE A BACKBONE ORGANIZATION**

- Forefront’s dedicated staff and resources directed to Census engagement were pivotal to Illinois’ success, and ensured our coalition continued to build momentum from 2017-2020.

- With dedicated Census leaders, our partners were able to make informed decisions about how to best navigate the complexities of engaging communities across Illinois.

- Forefront’s statewide reach resulted in more effective Census support and resources directed to rural communities who often fall into the hard-to-count category.
START PLANNING EARLIER

- Identify hard-to-count communities, set mutually understood priorities, and establish a communications strategy that will set the framework for the 2030 Census campaign. While unexpected circumstances will occur and pivots will have to be made, the goal of achieving a fair and accurate count will not change.

- Begin investing time in coalition building and community outreach at least five years in advance. Historical Census knowledge is often diminished by the time we start to consider programming for Census engagement and “Get Out the Count” (GOTC) activities.

- Build the Census 2030 Funders Collaborative by 2025. Consider the impact that Census-based allocations and decisions have had on funder grantees as well as the communities they serve. Early financial commitments will provide critical infrastructure and momentum to continue organizing.

- Awarding grants and convening grantees approximately a year in advance of the official Census Day (April 1, 2020) provided grantees with sufficient time to develop and implement their GOTC efforts.

PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING

- In 2020, the RFP developed by the ILCMI 2020 Funders Collaborative used the “Hard-to-Count” framework to distribute resources transparently and equitably. The Funders Collaborative strived to make the process accessible to smaller and nontraditional grantees and build a program which stressed collaboration and information sharing. This best practice became a model for our public partners, and players in Illinois’ Census ecosystem approached the challenge with a shared commitment.

- Set aside resources for small, innovative, and/or nontraditional grants. This was very useful in creating hyper-local outreach, which has proven to be most effective for hard-to-count communities.

- Both additional and more diverse private resources would have served us well. While the pooled fund of $1.75 million was impressive, we received over $6.5 million in grant requests.
MAINTAIN CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT WITH COLLABORATORS

- Forefront created and maintained a dedicated website with a calendar, critical updates, and other vital Census resources. We further established weekly emails and regular phone updates for funders, grantees, coalition partners, and others which allowed us to effectively collaborate in real time.

- Structure your campaign with a focus on sharing strategy, networking, and problem-solving. This will enhance the effectiveness of individual organizations and elevate combined Census efforts.

CREATE EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE MESSAGING

- Create messaging that promotes unity, collaboration, one’s own voice, and community. Messaging is most effective when shared by trusted messengers and kept consistent. Intentionally include experienced and contemporary marketing professionals as part of the coalition.

- Identify the crucial issues that are facing our nation, state, and municipalities. Include messaging that addresses these issues, as well as funding, political representation, and empowerment given back to communities.

- Consistently aggregate and share vetted Census news, which will help members of the coalition navigate communications and information challenges effectively and collaboratively.

- It is critically important to develop a complementing social media strategy. This may include training resources, convening invitations, toolkits, infographics, and multi-media content. Our comprehensive social media strategy increased participation during the self-response period.

CONNECT WITH US

Have questions about the information presented in this report? Reach out to:

- Dawn Melchiorre, Chief Operating Officer, at dmelchiorre@myforefront.org.
- Yusef Garcia, Vice President, Development & Communications, at ygarcia@myforefront.org.
Thank you to our grantees, our funders, and all the stakeholders who made this work possible.

GET OUT THE COUNT STATEWIDE GRANTEES

- Arab American Family Services
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago
- Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
- CHANGE Illinois
- Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
- Chicago Urban League
- City of North Chicago
- Claretian Associates
- Common Cause IL
- Communities United
- Enlace Chicago
- Faith Coalition for the Common Good, Inc
- First Ladies Health Alliance NFP
- Gail Borden Public Library
- Howard Brown Health
- Illinois Action for Children
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Illinois Migrant Council
- Illinois Partners for Human Service
- Latino Policy Forum
- Literacy Works
- Logan Square Neighborhood Association
- Mana a Mano Family Resource Center
- NAACP Chicago Westside Branch
- ONE Northside
- PASO West Suburban Action Project
- Public Narrative
- Sinai Community Institute
- Southern Illinois Community Foundation
- Southwest Organizing Project
- Spanish Community Center
- St. Agatha Catholic Parish
- The Resurrection Project
- United Congregations of Metro-East
- United Way of the Fox Valley and City of Aurora
- Waukegan Public Library and City of Waukegan
- Westside Health Authority
- Workers Center for Racial Justice NFP
- World Relief (Moline)
- YMCA of the University of Illinois
- YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

CHICAGO COUNT ME IN 2020 GET OUT THE COUNT GRANTEES

- Carole Robertson Center for Learning
- Center for Changing Lives
- Center on Halsted
- Chicago Reader
- Chicago Veterans
- Claretian Associates
- Community Organizing and Family Issues
- Faith in Place
- Far South CDC
- Fathers Who Care
- Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation
- I AM ABLE Center for Family Development Inc.
- Institute for Positive Living
- Japanese American Service Committee
- Hanul Family Alliance
- Latin United Community Housing Association
- Leave No Veteran Behind
- Metropolitan Tenants Organization
- Midwest Asian Health Association
- Muslim Community Inc.
- Northwest Side Housing Center
- Peace and Education Coalition
- Puerto Rican Cultural Center
- Red Clay Dance Company
- Resident Association of Greater Englewood
- Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
- Sinal Community Institute
- South Asian American Policy and Research Institute
- Spanish Coalition for Housing
- St. Paul Church
- Teamwork Englewood
- United African Organization
- Westside Health Authority
- Workers Center for Racial Justice

IL COUNT ME IN 2020 FUNDERS’ COLLABORATIVE

Co-Chairs: Mark Murray, Field Foundation; Deborah Bennet, Polk Bros. Foundation

- Anonymous Family Foundation
- Anonymous Foundation
- Chicago Bar Foundation
- The Chicago Community Trust
- Corner Family Foundation
- Conant Family Foundation
- Doris & Victor Day Foundation
- The Field Foundation of Illinois
- Forefront
- Grand Victoria Foundation
- Healthy Communities Foundation
- Irving Harris Foundation
- The Joyce Foundation
- JPMorgan Chase
- Julian Grace Foundation
- Loyd A. Fry Foundation
- MacArthur Foundation
- McCormick Foundation
- Pillsars Fund
- Polk Bros. Foundation
- Pritzker Traubert Foundation
- Steans Family Foundation
- Woods Fund

IL COUNT ME IN 2020 STATEWIDE ADVOCACY COALITION

- Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago
- ACLU of Illinois
- AgeOptions
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Arab American Family Services
- Arts Alliance Illinois
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice
- Change Illinois
- Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
- Chicago Urban League
- City of Chicago
- Common Cause Illinois
- Cook County Southland Juvenile Justice Council
- Cook County – Commissioner Anaya’s Office
- Cook County – Bureau of Economic Development
- Illinois Farm Bureau
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- Greater Chicago Food Depository
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