

PHILLY COUNTS 2020 FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 2021



*CITY OF PHILADELPHIA'S
2020 CENSUS
PARTICIPATION EFFORT*



I COUNT YOU COUNT PHILLY COUNTS

SPONSORED BY
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

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Executive Summary

Philly Counts 2020 is a temporary office of the City of Philadelphia created by Mayor Kenney's administration to support a complete and accurate count of Philadelphia residents in the 2020 Census. The primary goal of the Philly Counts office was to coordinate a community engagement campaign, empowering residents of historically undercounted neighborhoods to share information to create positive change in their community through census participation.

The goal of this report is to provide a thorough, data-driven understanding of the comprehensive, multifaceted field plan, designed and executed by Philly Counts, that addressed both individual and community outreach on the ground and also engaged partner organizations, local leaders, and philanthropic supporters, in a grassroots/grasstops strategy.

This report will summarize the work that was done by Philly Counts in diverse communities across Philadelphia from December 2018 through October 2020.

The reflections and learnings in this report will serve as a roadmap for the 2030 Census, building trust in historically undercounted communities, and mobilizing individuals and coalitions to civic action in Philadelphia and beyond.

Implications

Implications from Philly Counts 2020 include:

1. Community engagement must start earlier for 2030.
2. A close relationship with the local Census Bureau staff proved vital.
3. Flaws in the national Census Bureau plan had direct local impacts.
4. Create partnerships and raise funds to support outreach and engagement.
5. Partner with elected officials to maximize local impact.
6. Authentic engagement requires a financial investment.
7. Successful engagement must acknowledge racial histories.
8. Digital access is an equity issue that deserves funding and attention.
9. Leverage established networks to build trust in communities.
10. Diverse communities and neighborhoods require focused and integrated engagement.

Thank You



I want to thank our incredible partners for their tireless efforts to ensure a complete and accurate count in Philadelphia for the 2020 Census. Our city came together and demonstrated dedication and drive to ensure a complete and accurate count, and that work allowed for authentic and intentional engagement with Philadelphians, from all walks of life and in every neighborhood.

All of our incredible community partners attended meetings and planning events, utilized Philly Counts' promotional toolkits and materials, and participated in focus groups. All of this and more helped raise awareness about and increase participation in the 2020 Census.

The Philly Counts team along with the Complete Count Committee members and their subcommittees built the foundation for this outreach and community partners across the city ran with it, resulting in a tremendous and effective campaign.



This collaborative effort of meaningful engagement solidified a strong network of committed and passionate volunteers, who worked hard - making phone calls, volunteering with Philly Counts, attending or hosting a census training or event, or helping spread the word on social media – and all of these contributions made a difference.

As we reflect on 2020, we acknowledge there have been many new challenges that require innovative solutions and civic action. This Philly Counts engagement effort around the 2020 Census –as well as the COVID Community Response Captain program, and the team’s rapid response election support, are examples of how the City is working with communities to address these challenges together.

There is no doubt that these combined efforts (and more) to inspire participation in the 2020 Census had a powerful impact that will benefit our community for the next ten years and we should all be very proud of that. I look forward to continuing the work to support, uplift, inspire, and empower our communities.

With Gratitude,



Census Background

Every ten years, the United States Census Bureau conducts a count of the population of the United States during a defined timeline. The history of the census dates back to 1790 and is mandated under Title 13 of the United States Constitution.

In order to conduct an accurate count during this time, every person living in the United States must fill out a survey asking the number of people living in a household as well as demographic questions for each person listed.

The census has not been without controversy over the years. It is worth noting that very early census data counted African Americans as three-fifths of a person. This practice continued until 1868 when it was abolished. However, tactics to suppress the counting of African Americans and other people of color continued.

In the 1940's, census data was used to identify Japanese Americans for internment camps. For decades, the Census Bureau denied this data was used for that purpose, but in recent years has acknowledged this as fact and taken precautions to better protect the data they collect. Before 1950, the census included a citizenship question among those asked of households. In light of the breach of trust, the Census Bureau removed that question and it has not been included since.

The 2020 Census asked nine questions and, for the first time in history, was available to be completed online.

Importance and Impact of the Census

According to a 2019 study by George Washington University, every person counted represents approximately \$21,000 in federal funding for Pennsylvania.¹

When COVID-19 struck communities, the funding allocated by the federal government increased significantly to provide necessary relief and emergency funds. Census population data is a determining factor when allocating federal relief and recovery funds.

**Each person
counted in the
census represents**
\$21,000
**in federal funding
for local programs
and services**



The Census Count:

- Determines the amount of federal funding that is allocated to cities
- Is used to allocate the number of congressional seats and other elected offices
- Provides statistical data used by political leaders, businesses, and organizations to make decisions that impact local communities



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Philly Counts 2020 was established in January 2019 to execute a grassroots and grasstops campaign to encourage census participation. The strategy was built to support the United States Census Bureau and engage Philadelphians in the 2020 Census, with respect and close attention to the historically undercounted communities and the nuances of reaching each respectively.

The City of Philadelphia created Philly Counts under the Managing Director, appointed an Executive Director and established a Complete Count Committee. Immediately following, an early staff of two identified leaders for the Complete Count Committee and quickly staffed the office with a team of ten full time staff and ten support staff composed of interns, fellows, and workforce development placements.

In April of 2019, the Complete Count Committee hosted a public launch and press event, met to discuss key goals and the overall timeline and strategy, and established subcommittees.

One of the first steps when creating the office was to review documents from Philly Counts 2010 records. Those documents revealed that the bulk of the 2010 Census work was done by the Complete Count Committee, as is recommended by the Census Bureau.

In 2010 there were 19 subcommittees and the 2020 team followed the same model, focusing on building a constituency base through community leaders and organizations that were already deeply rooted in the historically undercounted communities.

Initially, it was clear there would be new challenges and additional work to supplement the organizing by committee. Therefore a comprehensive multilayered engagement plan was created to increase capacity by activating partners and volunteers while simultaneously mobilizing subcommittees and creating a community of practice for the entire network.



Challenges

The Census Bureau acknowledges that historically marginalized communities have been consistently undercounted in the census, particularly communities of color.² Philly Counts staff began developing their strategy by evaluating and determining the common challenges to census participation and challenges specific to the 2020 Census.

Philly Counts spent considerable time reflecting and understanding the historic trauma inflicted on communities of color and the legitimate reasons that such communities would be reluctant to share personal information with an agency that has broken that trust over time.

Counting Communities of Color

According to 2019 census data, communities of color make up the majority of Philadelphia.³

Communities of color cannot be blanketed into one strategy, with such a significant immigrant community in Philadelphia, challenges such as language barriers, understanding of the census, and distrust in government take on a nuance requiring a different approach than other communities of color.



43.6%

Philadelphians identify as black³

65.7%

Philadelphians that identify as non-white³

14%

Philadelphians that identify as as immigrant⁴

The racist and discriminatory practices that the black community have faced in this county cannot be ignored when asking people to complete a government form to be “counted” in the census. Many people have deep-rooted and valid distrust of the government. The trusted messenger model was decided to be the most important way to combat government distrust along with a strong emphasis on the confidentiality and protection of census data under Title 13.

Some additional challenges that were identified when determining the overall engagement strategy included:

- A local poverty rate of nearly 25%⁵ (pre-pandemic);
- An estimated 22.9%⁶ of residents without access to broadband internet; and
- The impacts of historic oppression and generational trauma leading to a deep mistrust of government.



Counting Immigrant Communities

No matter where
you were born,
EVERY living
person counts in
the Census.



It is also important to acknowledge the political climate and social realities that immigrants faced under the administration of President Donald Trump. During a time when concentration camps are actively operating and federal agents are aggressively rounding up people and incarcerating them, immigrants live in constant fear every day. Even immigrants who are here under a legal immigration status have concerns and fears when interacting with the government, so convincing people with an undocumented status that it is safe to complete the census was a primary area of concern.

The President's threat to bring back the abolished citizenship question, while a constant lingering concern that plagued the 2020 Census from the start, was doomed to fail. For one, it takes years to add or change census questions with numerous approval processes. For another, it is likely to intimidate people into not participating and therefore risk the accuracy of the census which is constitutionally mandated to count **EVERY** living person in the United States. Even though the question was later struck down, the threat of the question alone proved to significantly increase fear in the immigrant community.⁷

Continued Threats to Immigrant Communities

On July 21, 2020, the President issued a memo ordering the Census Bureau to remove all undocumented immigrants from the count. The memo called on the Census Bureau to review individual responses and cross reference that data with other government records to determine who is and is not documented.



Many legal arguments were raised around the country and the case was eventually punted by the Supreme Court, leaving the Bureau to eventually disregard the instructions after the change of administrations. However, like many actions before this, the threat alone did significant damage.

Because of these overt attacks on the immigrant community, many resources were designated to ensure the immigrant community participated and got counted in the census. It is worth noting that this inadvertently resulted in fewer resources dedicated to addressing the barriers to participation in the black community, which suffer from deep, intentional historic undercounts.



Misinformation & Disinformation

Another issue at the forefront of planning was the potential for spread of misinformation or, the more malicious and intentional disinformation. Some red flags that appeared early on were:

- With a lot of messaging around completing the census online, there were rumors that online was the only way to participate.
- People were not aware that the addition of a question regarding citizenship status was denied by the U.S. Supreme Court and thus did not appear on the questionnaire.
- Rumors circulated of criminals and ICE agents posing as fake enumerators, knocking on doors requesting money and personal information (while this started as a rumor, there were reports of impersonators during the enumeration period).
- There were online scams and fake phone calls, unofficial links to complete the census, and bad actors trying to get people's personal or financial information.

Philly Counts addressed each of these misinformation/disinformation issues in detail in the Census Champion training and created specific materials to address each of these concerns. Additionally, Philly Counts staff attended two misinformation simulation sessions, which prepared the team for what to do and not to do when misinformation was presented throughout the campaign. Finding the sessions very informative and helpful, Philly Counts also hosted a misinformation session for partners and stakeholders.

Internet First / First Digital Census

In a normal year, there are many challenges that create significant barriers to census participation. The challenges faced in 2020 were exacerbated by the new internet-first approach of the Census Bureau to increase participation in the census. With the internet-first approach, the Census Bureau urged people to complete the census survey online rather than the paper form, the method used in previous census years.

The Census Bureau used the introduction of the option to participate online to justify decreased funding for community-based partners and enumeration staff, and the elimination of neighborhood offices which made extra paper forms available in previous years. These decisions created additional barriers for households without internet access and cities with a deep digital divide.

Census Jobs & Enumerator Hiring

Census enumerators play an integral role in data collection needed for a complete and accurate count, and hold a particularly crucial role in counting historically undercounted neighborhoods. Many of Philadelphia's most historically undercounted neighborhoods have some of the City's lowest rates of digital access.

The lack of reliable internet connection, coupled with non-traditional addresses where the reliability of postal mail delivery can be difficult, can cause the Census Bureau's internet-first and subsequent paper form mailings to not be successful. Census enumerators thus play a critical role in collecting responses by engaging in-person with households in these neighborhoods - especially when enumerators are working in the neighborhoods where they live.

Before the pandemic hit Philadelphia, a census enumerator position was an attractive job for any of the following reasons: paid training, flexible schedule, pay rates up to \$27 an hour (based on position and location), government experience on one's resume, and the opportunity for growth within the Census Bureau. It is important to note, the application process for census jobs was only available online, again, failing to consider digital access and digital literacy.

Together, these challenges pointed to a clear reality for Philly Counts: encouraging participation in the 2020 Census would require a full city-wide effort with a focus on trust building and community education.

Engagement Plan

Philly Counts strategically chose to approach outreach and engagement in a way that prioritized a genuine connection between local government and residents. In order to confront the challenges and disparities in Philadelphia, Philly Counts determined that traditional outreach and marketing alone would not be effective for increasing census self-response rates.



The team was deliberate in its strategy to inform citizens about the importance of the census and its long term impact, not solely telling people to complete the census.

Philly Counts strategically built networks and engaged people in marginalized communities that are historically most undercounted, rather than focus on top-down messaging. This model of engagement was nationally recognized by the Director of the Census Bureau⁵ and they subsequently rolled out a similar program in other cities.



Complete Count Committee



In December 2018, Philly Counts began outreach to individual chairs of the Complete Count Committee to formulate a group of people to fill each respective subcommittee.

18

Subcommittees

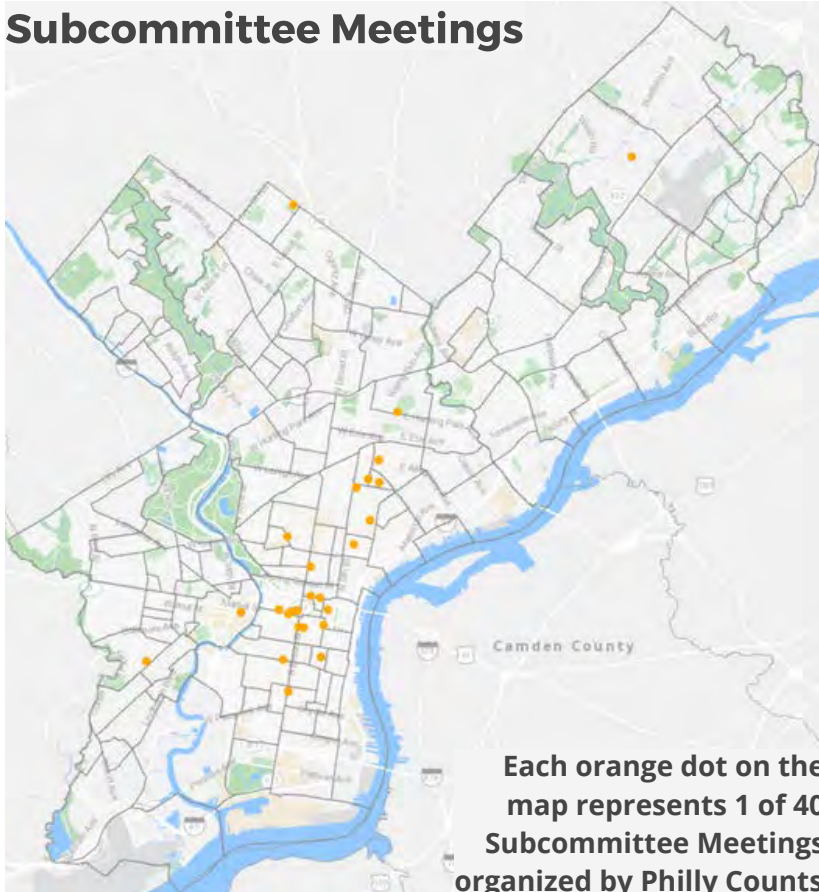
100

Subcommittee members

40

Subcommittee Meetings

Subcommittee Meetings



Each orange dot on the map represents 1 of 40 Subcommittee Meetings organized by Philly Counts

The Complete Count Committee was created to guide and support efforts to ensure a complete and accurate count. Chaired by the Mayor, the Complete Count Committee, its subcommittees and designated chairs were chosen because the individuals represented Philadelphia's diverse communities and historically undercounted populations.

Philly Counts worked closely with each subcommittee chair from the beginning, building capacity, staffing the subcommittee, conducting and recording efficient monthly meetings, and developing and executing the engagement plan.



Every subcommittee member received training, materials, and a planning toolkit. The Philly Counts 2020 Planning Toolkit served as a roadmap for Philly Counts' action plan to capture and channel both ideas and expectations for partner engagement from August 2019 through the end of the 2020 Census.

During these monthly subcommittee meetings, Philly Counts conducted round table discussions on how to best support subcommittee members in their census outreach and the most effective methods of engagement. Conversations and feedback from subcommittee meetings provided Philly Counts with necessary knowledge to accurately and effectively center historically undercounted communities at the forefront of the Philly Counts engagement plan.

In addition to monthly subcommittee meetings, the Complete Count Committee convened on a quarterly basis to share the work of each subcommittee and discuss key dates, events, and Philly Counts' goals for the upcoming quarter.

A full list of the Complete Count Committee and subcommittee members can be found at the end of this report.

Census Job Recruitment

The Census Bureau was tasked with hiring more than 3,000 temporary workers and Philly Counts worked in close partnership with local Census Bureau staff to spread awareness of the job opportunities and ensure access to the job application process in undercounted communities through targeted job fairs.



From June 2019 to February 2020, the Philly Counts office helped coordinate 115 census job fairs throughout Philadelphia with support from community partners. After developing the relationship with the Philly Counts office, some organizations were able to organize recurring recruitment sessions in their spaces. In January 2020, recruitment rates were still very low across the country. In response, the Census Bureau announced they would increase the base pay rate for census enumerators in certain key areas.

In Philadelphia, the base pay rose from \$21 to \$25.50 while some suburban counties went up to \$27. Philly Counts mobilized the Census Jobs Subcommittee, coordinating, with Philadelphia Works, Inc., nearly 60 organizations, all focused on workforce development in Philadelphia, to amplify the recruitment effort through social media, posting literature, and hosting job fairs.

115

JOB FAIRS
organized by
Philly Counts





Trusted Messenger Engagement

The **foundation** of the engagement plan was centered around **person-to-person** outreach.

In Philadelphia, this is known to be the most effective way to disseminate information and build trust, especially with the persistent challenges stemming from deep poverty, low internet access, and distrust of government.

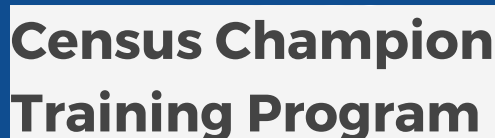
In order for the importance and urgency of the census to be effectively relayed, the messages needed to come from people who are known and trusted in the community.

Philly Counts approached their work with the understanding that the people who live in and serve a neighborhood know that community the best.

There are many community-based organizations and individuals doing powerful work in Philadelphia neighborhoods. If given the support, resources, and infrastructure, they could be brought together for the common goal of a complete and accurate count. With this understanding guiding the strategy, Philly Counts built a campaign to empower Philadelphia residents as trusted messengers to encourage a complete census count in their community.

Launched on September 17, 2019 (Constitution Day), the first initiative to engage residents was the Census Champion program. Between September 2019 and February 2020, Philly Counts and volunteers successfully trained nearly 6,000 Philadelphians to be Census Champions and spread awareness and encourage participation in the census in their own communities.

In total, Philly Counts hosted 172 Census Champion trainings, in 8 different languages, across the city. The Census Champion program was designed with a goal of sharing census information in every Philadelphia neighborhood.



5,940

Census Champions Trained

Holding training sessions across the city allowed us to train nearly 6,000 Census Champions in the most historically undercounted neighborhoods.

As a Census Champion, residents became trusted messengers in their community, equipped with knowledge and the tools to accurately answer hard questions about the census. With these tools, Census Champions motivated their family, friends, and neighbors to answer their census form, whether online, over the phone, or via the paper form. One-on-one conversations are crucial to educate and engage community members and this was the basis of the trusted messenger model.

During a Census Champion training, participants learned the importance and impact of the census in Philadelphia, options for responding, and possible scams to be aware of and avoid.

The training concluded with real life simulations where participants practiced talking to others about what they learned and encouraged the participation of others who may feel skeptical about completing the census.



At the end of the training, Census Champions were awarded a button to display their knowledge and spread awareness, as well as reference material for encouraging others to participate in the census.

“The Census Champion Trainings were wonderful - first because of important information, but also because people knew that there were others in the community who were ready to help them also become aware of resources.”

- Leity Rodriguez

**DIRECTOR
STEVEN
DILLINGHAM**

The National Director of the United States Census Bureau attended one of the 70+ trainings held on September 17, 2019 and lauded the program, stating that the census champion training model would be effective in other cities.⁸

Accessibility was a priority, therefore Philly Counts conducted Census Champion trainings in eight languages: English, Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese, and American Sign Language. Training sessions were mostly held in locations where people already regularly gathered to make the experience easily accessible and comfortable for attendees. For example, locations of sessions spanned all across the city, including in churches, recreation centers, school classrooms, senior centers, and community meetings.

“The census champion trainings were really effective, and people liked being able to participate in a program that gave them a certification or seal from the city of being a census expert.”

John Chin, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation

Census Information Sessions

In response to the community need to include census information in their standing meetings along with regular updates, Philly Counts offered census informational sessions, which highlighted the main components of the signature Census Champion Training in a 10-20 minute presentation. The census information sessions were one method that Philly Counts used to promote census outreach and awareness in a shortened, friendly, and digestible way.

Often, if a few people had attended a past Census Champion Training and were rewarded a button or already held the connection with Philly Counts, information session attendees would show subsequent interest in other upcoming potential Philly Counts activities, to keep up with their peers and to bring this connection to their respective communities.



Philly Counts Action Fund



In an early scan of potential challenges to the 2020 Census count, Philly Counts staff uncovered that money to support partner outreach was missing from the Census Bureau budget. This was a significant shift from the previous year.

In 2010, the Philadelphia region was allocated \$554,000 by the federal government that was granted to community partners to support efforts in historically undercounted communities. In 2020, the Census Bureau zeroed out that fund, eliminating financial support for partners.

Philly Counts staff believed that support from community partners would be more important than ever and set out to establish its own fund to replace the missing federal support.

The Philly Counts Action Fund, launched in August of 2019, was housed and administered by Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia. It was a rapid response grant program designed to quickly move money from funders to grantees.

Established in August of 2019, in partnership with Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia, the Philly Counts Action Fund was a rapid-response grant program designed to quickly distribute money from funders to grantees.

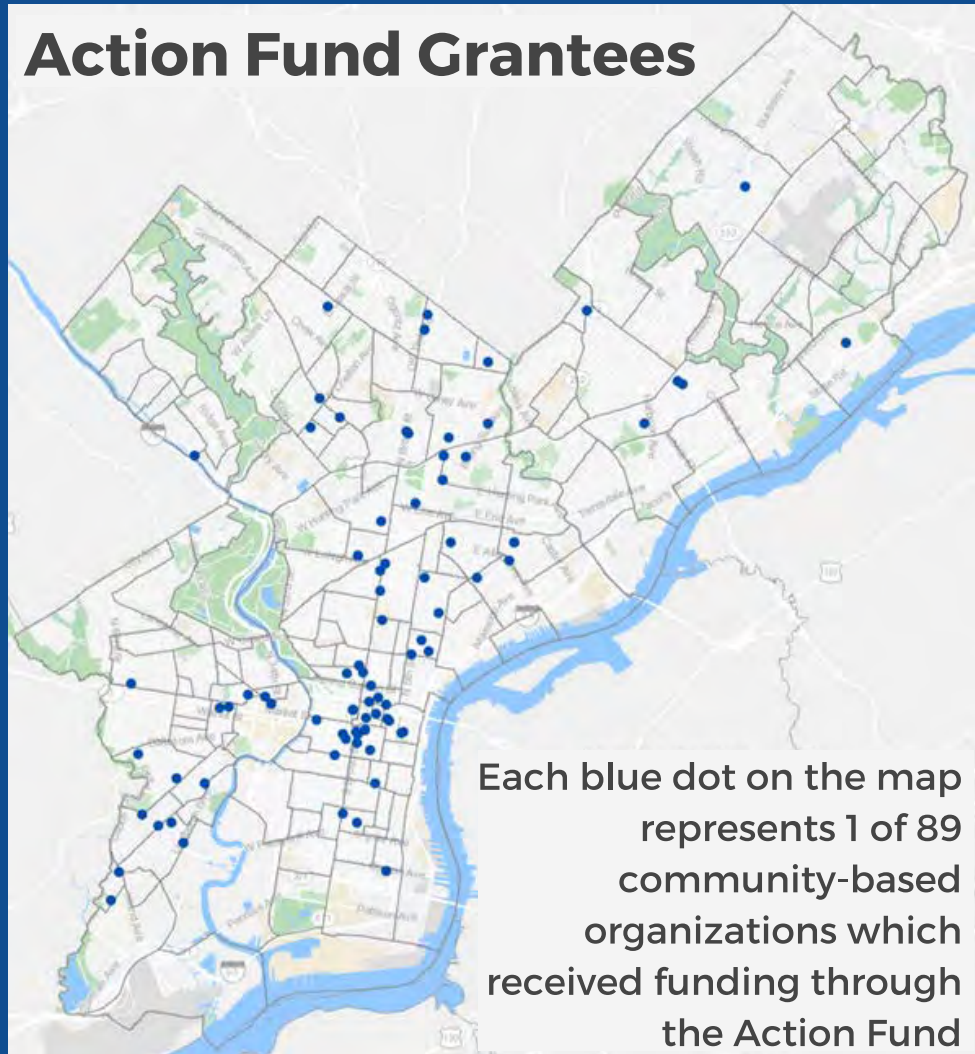
In its creation, the fund leveraged existing networks of trusted community-based groups and organizations, providing grants to non-profit organizations already doing important work in their communities to incorporate census promotions and events into their work. Philly Counts provided a community of practice, guidance, materials and a strategic plan for all grantees to reach the common goal of a complete and accurate count.

The Action Fund helped establish Philly Counts as a trusted partner by connecting supplemental resources to the community of people doing the work.

Throughout the course of the program, the fund raised \$800,000, supporting 95 projects across 89 organizations. The organizations who benefitted from the Philly Counts Action Fund varied widely, including non-profits that ranged from highly-established city-wide organizations to small neighborhood-based organizations whose grant award was the first competitive grant they had received.

A full list of Action Fund donors and recipients can be found in the appendix of this report.

Action Fund Grantees



Action Leader Summit

The Philly Counts Action Leader Summit was a free, full-day summit that featured panel discussions about historically undercounted communities, a Q&A session with the Census Bureau, a presentation on Philly Counts' data-informed engagement strategy, and a planning session in neighborhood groups. The summit provided a full organizing experience to all the attendees, with no fees to attend. The summit took place on November 9, 2019. Among the hundreds of attendees, most were Census Champions and individuals who wanted to get more involved in census engagement efforts.



Philly Counts partnered with seven national organizations to provide in-depth discussions based on recent studies about various historically undercounted communities in Philadelphia, such as Hispanic or Latino, African American, Asian American, LGBTQ+, Children under five-years-old, and the older adult community.



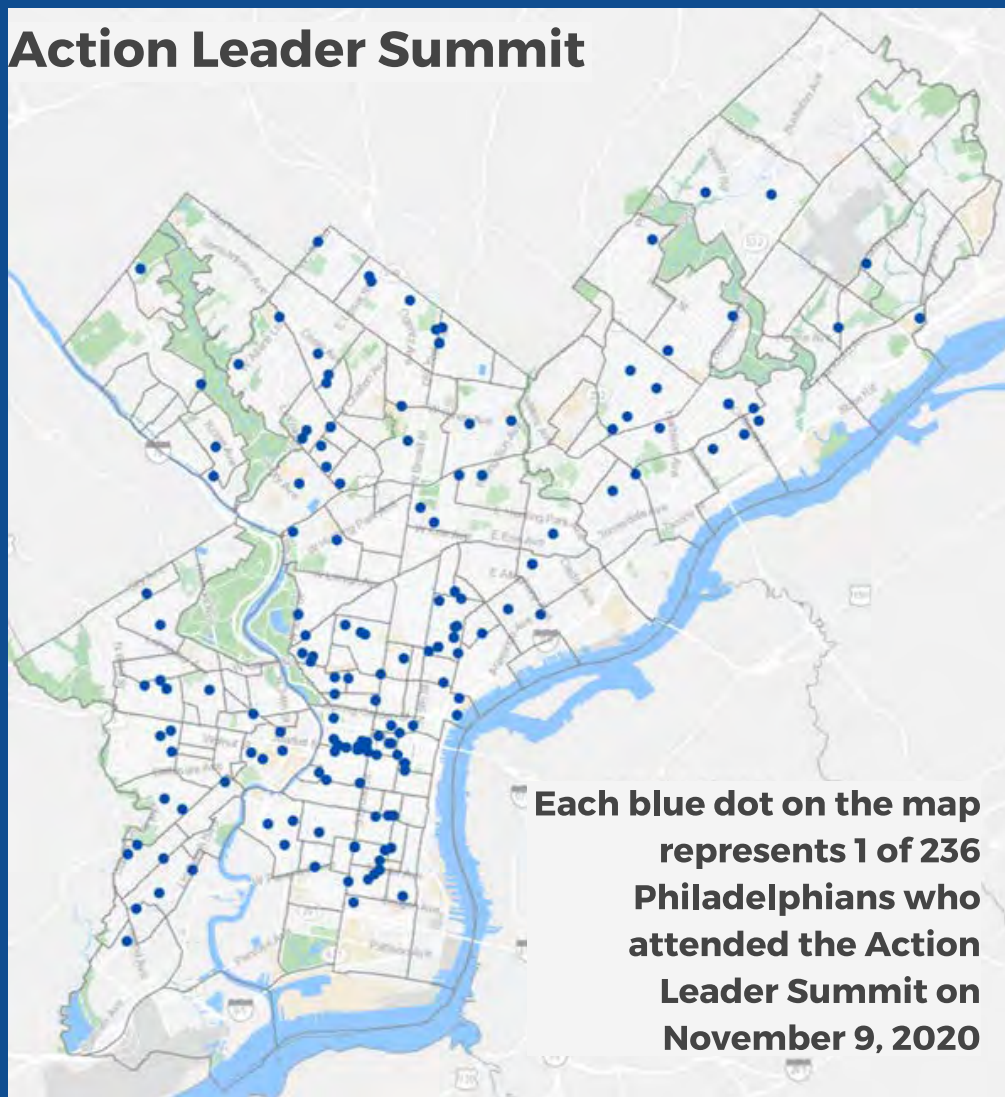
Standing, Left to right: **Julio Rivera**, NALEO, **Stephanie Sun**, (proxy for) Asian Americans Advancing Justice, **Dan Warner**, (proxy for) National LGBTQ Task Force.
Seated Left to right: **Jeri Green**, National Urban League, **Trude Haecker**, MD, Reach Out & Read, **Yocasta Lora**, AARP, **Emely Paez**, Hispanic Federation, and **Jo Lin**, Keystone Counts

The Action Leader Summit presented an opportunity to bring supporters together to network, learn, and plan for census outreach in their neighborhoods.

The summit centered on the best practices of meeting and engaging people at their neighborhood level through people they know and trust.

The final session of the day featured breakouts by region with poster-size maps and calendars. Attendees worked together to incorporate suggested actions, identify potential Census Champions, and imagine a plan that would best reach their neighbors and friends.

Action Leader Summit



Commit-to-Count



In January 2020, Philly Counts kicked off a Commit-to-Count campaign for people to commit to participating in the 2020 Census.

These cards had two sections: one had information about the census for the individual to keep and the other was a tear-off postcard where people could write their address and a reminder to themselves to participate in the 2020 Census. These postcards were mailed back to people in March, once the 2020 Census self-response period opened.

Philly Counts collected and mailed back more than **15,000** Commit-to-Count cards, including roughly **10,000** English cards, **4,000** Spanish cards, and more than **1,000** Mandarin cards.

These cards were included in every Census Champion Training packet, brought to information sessions and other events, and given to partners in bulk to distribute throughout the communities they serve.

A digital Commit-to-Count version of the card was also introduced so residents could sign up via an online form. Similar to the physical cards, the e-postcard was sent to their email addresses when the self-response period opened. In total, 377 digital Commit-to-Count cards were registered.

Although Philly Counts believed (and continues to believe) physical collateral, like the Commit-to-Count cards were necessary in confronting the digital divide in Philadelphia, the resources and time spent creating and maintaining systems to track and distribute these cards did not create an ample return on investment.

In future census engagement campaigns, a more deliberate tracking system will need to be created in advance of a Commit-to-Count card program, or be altered to ensure that resources invested are returned.

Additionally, these cards should be used at the onset of a future census engagement campaign, rather than launched part-way through.



MLK Day of Service

Philly Counts was a lead partner on Global Citizen and the Urban Affairs Coalition's 2020 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service at Girard College. Supported in part by the Philly Counts 2020 Action Fund, two key activities at this event supported increasing census participation in Philadelphia.



The signature project featured elected officials making wooden, decorated drop boxes for collecting Commit-to-Count cards at community locations such as libraries and health centers. In addition, Philly Counts led volunteers in writing postcards to households in historically undercounted census tracts.



Volunteers constructed more than 40 drop boxes for Commit-to-Count cards that could be placed at various locations.

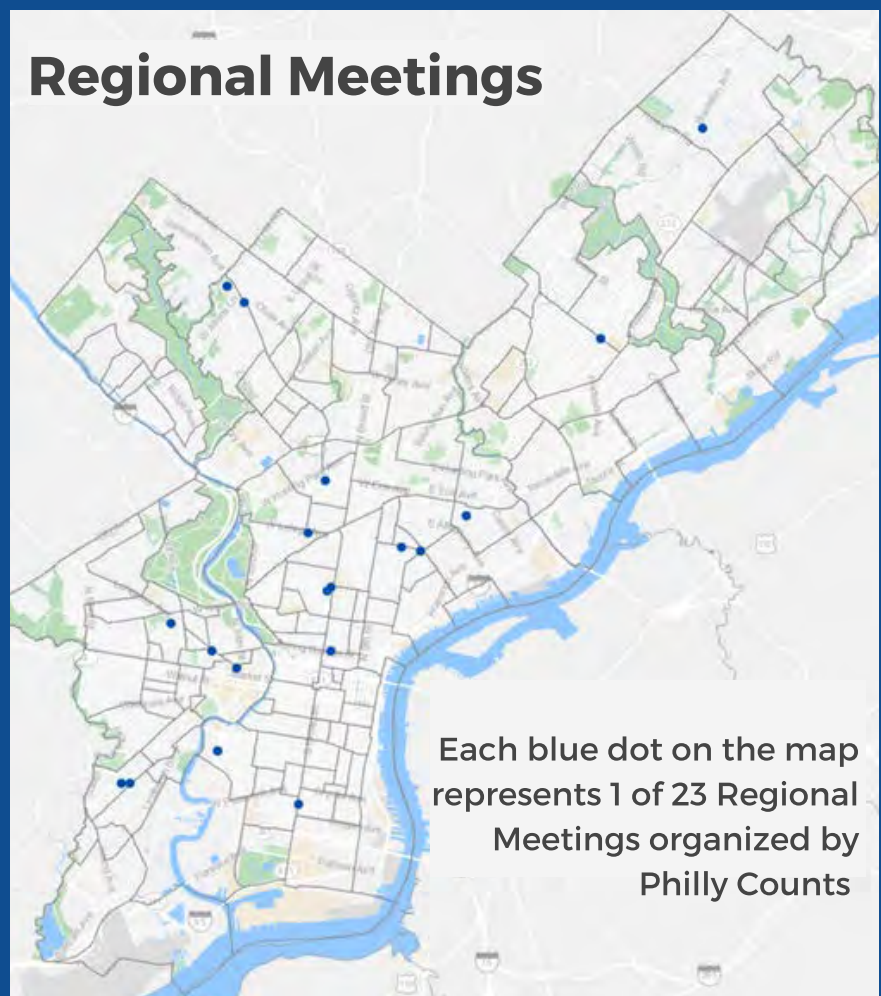
Commit-to-Count postcards were dropped in the box. The contents of the boxes were periodically returned to Philly Counts.

- Tom Wolf, Bob Casey,
Josh Shapiro, Rebecca Rhynhart.

Regional Organizing

The initial outreach and engagement focused on constituencies such as those represented by the subcommittees. By summer 2019, Philly Counts realized this approach did not effectively reach every neighborhood to increase response rates. Therefore, in October 2019, Philly Counts incorporated a regional organizing strategy to supplement the work that was already happening. Philly Counts reviewed updated engagement maps depicting contacts (census champions, volunteers, and event attendees who had signed in or registered online) and realized vital networks were not being activated in some key neighborhoods.

After careful reflection and deliberation with partners, Philly Counts determined that while organizing by constituency, through subcommittees, is effective for some groups, local groups and service organizations operate hyper-locally and serve the people around them, based on location and not constituency. Thus, in order to successfully execute a city-wide campaign, Philly Counts needed to focus its engagement on a neighborhood level.



In November 2019, Philly Counts held the first of several regional organizing meetings in seven regions of the city: North, Northwest, Northeast, Far Northeast, West, Southwest, and South. By planning according to a more geographic strategy, Philly Counts was able to recognize overlooked divisions between demographics, and instead, used monthly Regional Organizing Meetings to bring all stakeholders from each area, under one roof, to engage in census planning and census actions while holding one another accountable through the framework of the original subcommittee model.



Action Days

Canvassing and block parties

Philly Counts organized three weekends of census action to include door hanger canvassing efforts, a series of block parties with giveaways, and a Census Day celebration on April 1.

The plan was designed to meet people where they are, in their communities. Action Days were set to take place in 2020 on March 21, March 28, and April 4; in the lowest responding neighborhoods. A foundation for these days was outlined during the Action Leader Summit in November of 2019.

Continuing the practice of meeting people where they are and leveraging established community partners in priority areas, the intent was to attend several block parties every weekend, at the invitation of community partners.

Block parties are an iconic summer scene in Philadelphia during the spring and summer months. They draw whole communities out of their homes to gather with neighbors and friends, eat, play games, and listen to music.

Philly Counts would invite the Census Bureau Mobile Questionnaire Assistance program to give people access to fill out the census as they gathered in their communities.

Funds were earmarked for special giveaways including t-shirts, hats, and buttons and iconic Philadelphia foods such as water ice and soft pretzels to be given out with census information and conversations.





At this point in the engagement program, invitations to participate in the 2020 Census would already be arriving at households and the online and phone portals would be open. The goal of these pop-up events was to create a fun buzz around census participation and to raise awareness in neighborhoods where mail from the Census Bureau would likely be missed for a variety of reasons.

Using asset mapping and overlaying the Philly Counts engagement map with historically undercounted neighborhoods and areas of low internet access, Philly Counts established priority areas for Door Hanger Canvassing.

A collaboration was established with recreation centers, libraries, and community organizations to have 74 launch sites for volunteers to convene to execute the canvassing efforts. The launch sites were deliberately chosen in historically undercounted neighborhoods.

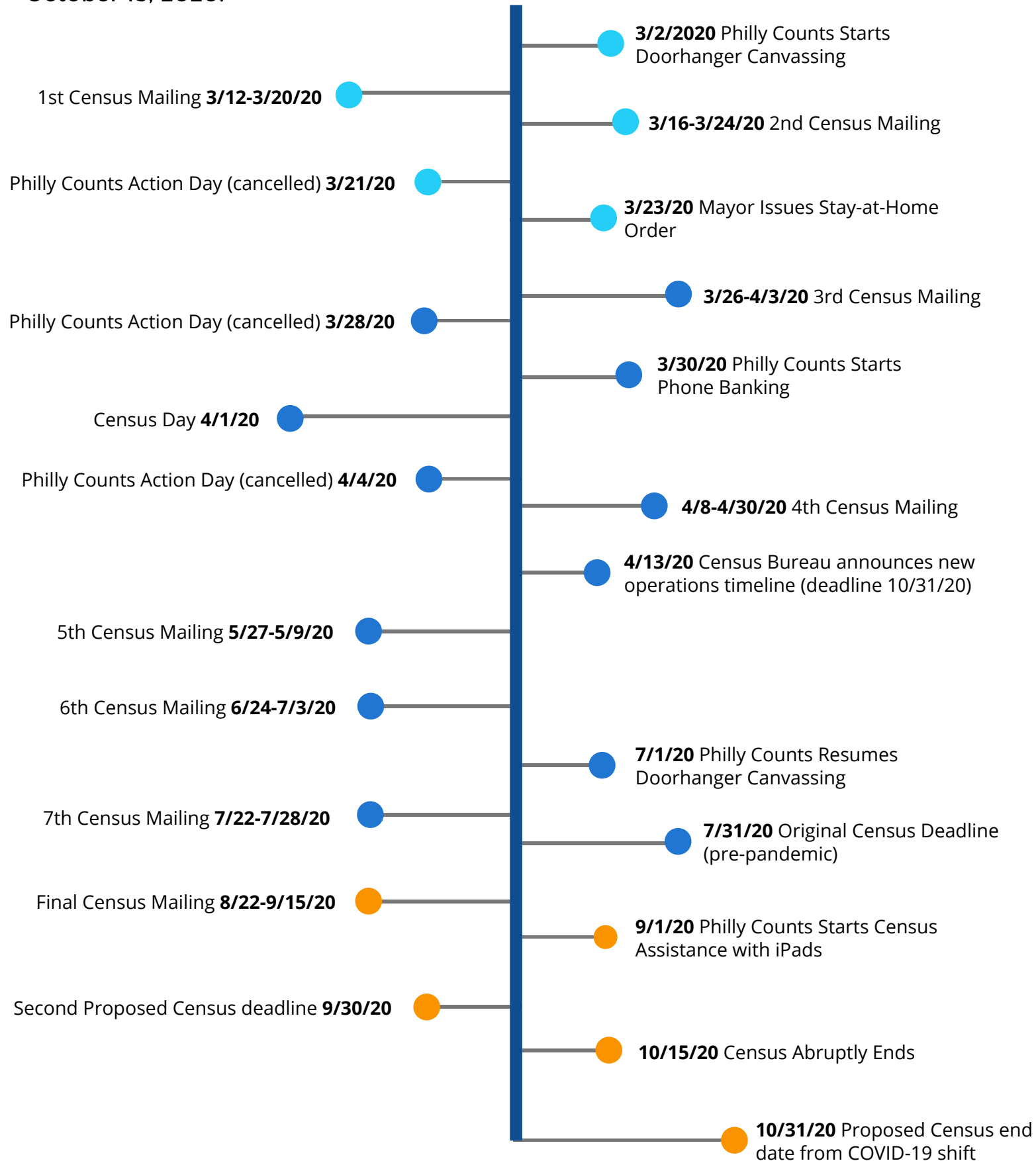
Philly Counts staff would deliver all the materials in advance and assign a site lead and site support volunteer to give the volunteers the instructions, door hangers, and the canvass routes. The site lead would also be responsible for reporting back the outcome and return any unused materials or unfinished routes to Philly Counts.

The canvassers were instructed to not knock on doors, to avoid confusion with enumerators from the Census Bureau and reduce the opportunity for scammers who pose as enumerators.



Impact of the Pandemic on the Census Timeline

When the pandemic started, the Census Bureau requested statutory relief from Congress to extend their operations timeline and conclude data collection on October 31, 2020 however in the summer they updated it to September 30 due to Congress not approving the extension. The final deadline announcement came on October 13, 2020 stating self response and field operations would conclude on October 15, 2020.



Challenges During the Pandemic

1. STAY-AT-HOME ORDER

2. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

3. GROUP QUARTERS

4. COLLEGE STUDENTS BEING SENT HOME

5. NATIONAL UPRISING AND HEIGHTENED DISCRIMINATION CONCERNS

6. ENUMERATOR HIRING

7. MAILING CONCERNS

The first wave of mail invitations to respond to the Census arrived in mid-March 2020.

This was a critical time in the Philly Counts engagement plan, and unfortunately coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic reaching Philadelphia.

What began as a steady stream of barriers to the community engagement campaign in the spring quickly became a flood of challenges as the work continued through the summer with an updated timeline.





1. Stay-at-Home Order

On March 22, 2020, Mayor Kenney issued stay-at-home orders that put a full stop to all face-to-face outreach operations — the most effective part of the planned engagement strategy. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Philly Counts Action Days were the first of the planned tactics to be shelved as a response to quickly changing guidance from the CDC and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health. With the strategy of the engagement campaign centering around person-to-person outreach through canvassing and events, the inability to execute the Action Days posed an immediate setback.



2. Colleges & Universities

Due to the pandemic, all college students were sent home in March 2020, before receiving the opportunity to participate in the census at their college address. Philly Counts phone banking outreach to students showed that many of their families included them on their census at home, a practice that results in a significant undercount in the Philadelphia college community, where the Census Bureau requires they be counted, and also impacts the surrounding community. Philadelphia is home to 18 colleges and universities, making this part of the operation very important for a complete and accurate count.

The significant confusion and miscommunication was compounded by the fact that, by requirement of the U.S. Census Bureau, students that lived on campus were to be counted through an administrative record process while those who lived in off campus housing were required to submit their own responses. Despite the different methods of counting students on and off campus, the overall message was consistently that everyone should be counted where they are on April 1, which is in direct conflict with students who live on/off campus during the school year and were sent home due to COVID-19.



3. Group Quarters

The Census Bureau classifies all people not living in housing units (house, apartment, mobile or rented homes) as living in group quarters. The group quarter count includes nursing homes, correctional facilities, group homes, missions and shelters, and is started in advance of the count of the general population in order to ensure a complete count of the group quarter population.

The group quarter count was complicated by the shifting timelines, resulting in confusion about when people would be counted. In addition, COVID regulations made it challenging to find people gathered for enumeration, as was done in previous years, and created barriers to gaining access to group home buildings.

Community based organizations expressed frustration after failed attempts to contact the Census Bureau and gain clarification on their window for counting. Administrators were prepared to submit a data file via bulk upload early in the count, but waited months for a clear process. Furthermore, the Census Bureau did not accept digital records from shelters and homeless services organizations, even though the information was readily available.

4. National Uprising and Heightened Discrimination Concerns

Tensions between residents and both local and federal government were heightened during the summer of 2020. Civil unrest stemming from the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, a national reckoning with police oversight and funding, as well as hostility and discrimination towards Asian Americans and other members of Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities due to misinformation around the spread of COVID-19 impacted the message and mode of engagement. These events heightened distrust in government, further complicating outreach to neighborhoods with low response rates.

5. Enumerator Hiring

The U.S. Census Bureau created challenges within their own operational practices that were exacerbated by the pandemic. There was a focus on hiring people from the neighborhoods where they would work, however the only application method was online, again disadvantaging communities in the digital divide. As the pandemic waged, many applicants sat waiting for months while the Census Bureau scrambled to communicate timelines and move applicants through background checks, onboarding, and training processes.



15.1%

**of Philadelphians indicated
they did not receive an
invitation to participate in
the 2020 Census**

Total Survey Responses: 35,020

6. MAILING CONCERNS

During phone banking conversations with residents, Philly Counts found inconsistencies related to paper census questionnaire mailings, with 15.1% of phonebank respondents stating they never received an invitation to participate whether online or by paper questionnaire. It is unclear what portion of these respondents simply missed the mail or how much was related to challenges at the United States Postal Services (USPS). However, the fact remains that a significant slice of Philadelphia residents believed they did not receive an invitation.

7. SHIFTING TIMELINES

Finally, there was indecision and multiple changes to the deadline to self respond to the census. Originally, cities, states, and community partners were funded and planning to work on the census through July. The pandemic led to an expanded timeline, but offered no additional funding to support ongoing work.

**Altogether, these problems created a sea of chaos
around the 2020 Census that upended
Philly Counts' plans and a new plan was required.**

Engagement | During COVID-19



DOOR HANGER CANVASSING

Community partners	58
Neighborhoods canvassed	87
Households canvassed	289,000

Nearly half of all
Philadelphia households
were canvassed.

Door Hanger Canvassing



Realizing that the Action Days would not be possible due to precautions and restrictions on large gatherings, Philly Counts immediately began working to get out as many door hangers as possible. At this time, the deadline for self-response was still mid-summer and it was unclear if there would be another opportunity to safely run a canvass. Philly Counts staff and volunteers immediately launched into smaller door hanger canvassing in early March 2020. The canvassing efforts were halted when Mayor Kenney officially announced stay-at-home orders in an effort to curb the spread of the pandemic.

Canvassing was able to pick up again, with safety precautions and the proper PPE, in July 2020 due to the census timeline extension. In the end, Philly Counts coordinated with 58 partners, distributing nearly 300,000 door hangers throughout Philadelphia – nearly half of all households. The canvassing efforts focused predominantly on West and North Philadelphia, while also targeting low-response census tracts in South and Northeast Philadelphia.

A New Reality

Authentic and thorough engagement in a new social context

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Philadelphia was palpable, and Philly Counts immediately recognized the need to pivot the work to better encompass the realities of the most historically undercounted communities.

A campaign like Philly Counts requires a deep understanding of the target audience and the social and political climate. This context was extremely important in order to craft a persuasive and cohesive message that inspires people to action.

People were faced with immediate job losses, misinformation about the virus and necessary precautions, often combined with housing and food insecurity. Philly Counts was particularly conscious, working with communities in the city that have been historically undercounted, that many of these communities already suffer from significant economic hardship and that talking about the census alone during this time would be insensitive and potentially harmful to the campaign.

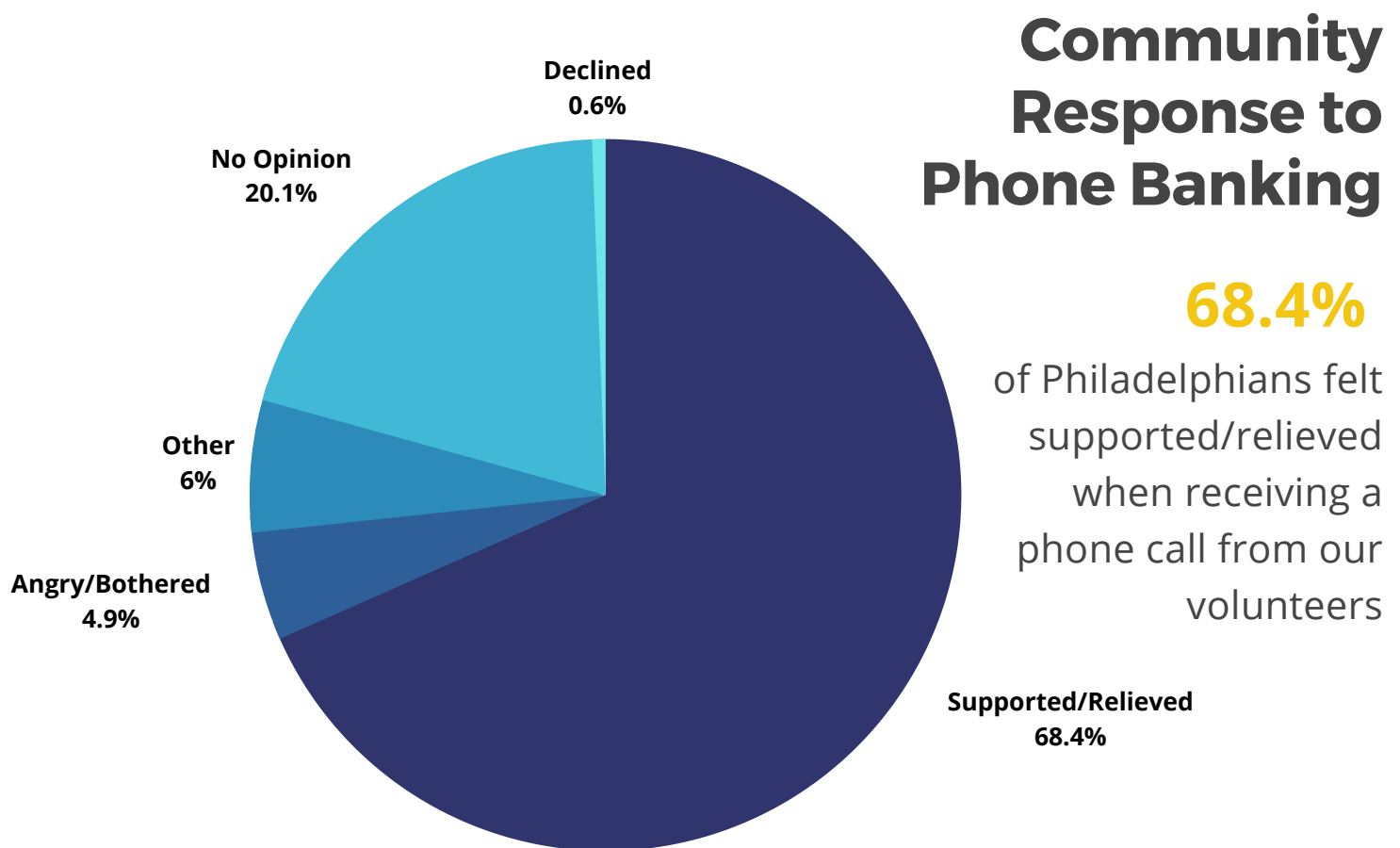


From the beginning, the foundation of the Philly Counts outreach strategy was designed to engage communities in a manner that valued residents and community leaders. Engagement extended to all corners of the city and the groundwork laid in the early planning phases was effective at mobilizing partners and volunteers. The strategy originally focused on face-to-face communication, but with the physical distance protocols, phone banking offered a safe and potentially effective alternative.

Phonebanking

In April 2020, considering the complex and urgent needs in the community, Philly Counts launched a trauma-informed organizing strategy, centered on phone banking, to reach people during stay-at-home orders. An email was sent to recruit volunteers, online trainings were scheduled, and the phone banking program was launched on March 30, 2020, within days of the stay-at-home order. In the first days of phone banking, callers used a script that exclusively asked about census participation.

Philly Counts staff joined the phone banking effort and as they made calls and had conversations with residents struggling to understand the new reality, staff quickly recognized the original approach lacked an understanding of both the historical and current trauma experienced by the same communities who are historically undercounted. It was insensitive to call people and ask them to complete the census if they were struggling with access to basic needs.



Total Responses: 4952

As an office of government, Philly Counts had access to information about services and resources that communities needed, so it was determined that phone bank volunteers would begin their outreach calls with a basic needs assessment before discussing census participation. With this new trauma-informed approach, volunteers began to thoughtfully reach out to individuals and families across the city to check-in.

In these conversations, staff and volunteers connected people to resources to aid in food security, housing assistance, or any other basic needs. While expressing empathy and genuine concern for residents, the conversations also raised awareness about the 2020 Census, how to participate, and its impact in the city's recovery for the next ten years and beyond.

After the completion of the census, when reflecting on the process, one phone bank volunteer shared her experience with the trauma-informed approach, "Updating the phone banking scripts was very impactful. The notion of the City checking in on residents' needs helped inspire more interest from residents in connecting with the City."

The majority of phone bankers were volunteers who joined when they were available. However, there were some partners that provided stipends to phonebanking participants who made calls on a regular basis.



These partnerships were key to the success of the program, significantly increasing the capacity for calls and the deep knowledge of the people making calls. The partnership with the Mayor's Commission on Aging was among the most important.

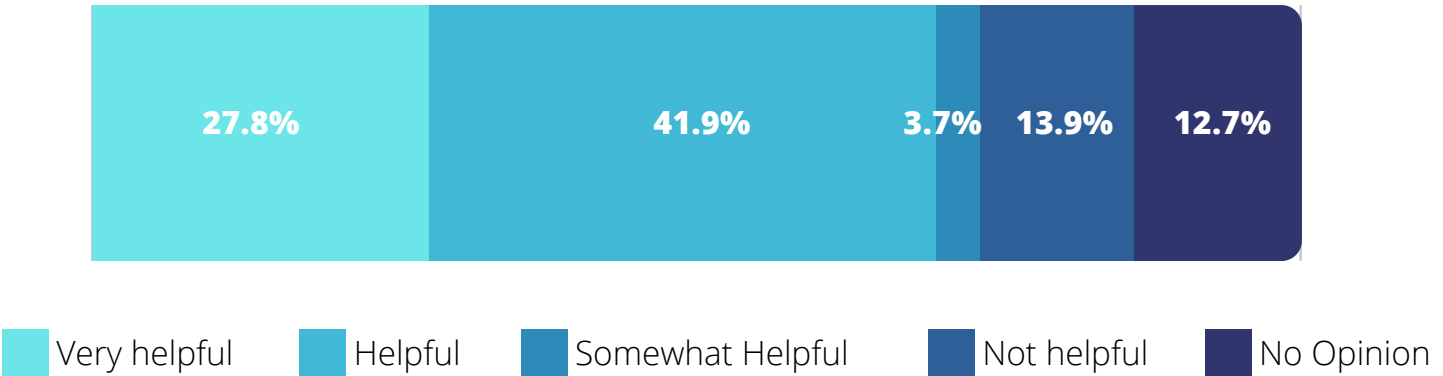
The Commission provides older adults access to employment throughout the city. As businesses moved to virtual work, many participants were left without assignments. The partnership created an opportunity for participants to continue their employment remotely and also significantly expanded the reach of the phone banking program. Furthermore, over time the participants developed a deep understanding of what resources and services were available and were able to better help people who expressed needs during calls.

Conversations with residents gave Philly Counts keen insight into their daily struggles as the pandemic waged on. These issues included COVID-related unemployment, financial troubles, struggles to access prescription medication, scarcity of PPE, food insecurity, and loneliness. The script was updated often to ensure questions reflected the needs of the community and provided access to resources and information that could assist residents as it was released by the City of Philadelphia.

The phone banking volunteer capacity grew to a network of **600 volunteers**, helping make more than **300,000 calls**, approximately half of the 600,000 occupied households in the city, since the start on March 30, 2020.⁸

Information Shared via Phone Banking

73.4% of Philadelphians found the information our volunteers shared was very helpful, helpful or somewhat helpful



Total Survey Responses: 4092

All told, the phone banking effort touched every corner of the city, with an emphasis on historically undercounted areas that allowed us to reach every block in the lowest census response neighborhoods. This effort deepened the trust that Philly Counts built over time, organizing and engaging the community, and was critical to expanding the COVID-relief and census efforts throughout the pandemic.

COVID-19 Community Response Captain Training

While designing the phone banking program, Philly Counts was simultaneously developing the COVID Community Response Captain (CRC) program in partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and the Mayor's Office. This partnership ensured that Philly Counts had access to all of the latest information from the City regarding COVID-19 updates and services and resources for communities. In addition to direct outreach through phone banking, the CRC training allowed for deeper engagement with trusted messengers across the city to better distribute information about COVID-19 and city services throughout, especially in historically undercounted communities.

Similar to the Census Champion Training, the network of trusted messengers and partners was pivoted to train residents to support their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included information on symptoms of COVID-19, precautions to keep individuals and families safe, and public health, city and state resources available for COVID-19 relief. The Community Response Captain (CRC) Training was available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, and French, Philadelphia's four most spoken languages, to ensure accessibility. This program ran from April 2020 through June 2020, empowering over 1,800 residents with critical information and resources to take back to their communities.

SUPPORT YOUR NEIGHBORS

Become a COVID-19 Community Response Captain



Philly Counts

Often the CRC participants had the time available and the passion to help their community that made them more inclined to volunteer with Philly Counts, especially with the needs assessment. Not only was the CRC training a funnel for volunteers to build out the phone banking program, but it also ensured that our phone bankers had all of the information they needed to help the people they called.

Promotional Materials

As COVID restrictions were relaxed in late summer, Philly Counts restarted canvassing efforts. Since large group restrictions still prevented block parties, funding originally designated for those events was used to purchase and distribute thousands of swag items including t-shirts, hats, visors, tote bags, and PPE. Philly Counts provided volunteers and organizations these items to wear and give away while they were hand delivering census information throughout key neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

"FOR THE COMMUNITY, THE PRINT MATERIALS AND THE SWAG WERE THE MOST EFFECTIVE. WHEN PEOPLE SEE THESE ADVERTISEMENTS..., THEY EVENTUALLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S ABOUT."

-FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Through this effort, Philly Counts organized volunteers to go into many of the historically undercounted neighborhoods delivering census information directly to residents. The pandemic made it difficult to knock on doors to engage people. Instead, Philly Counts relied on conversations with people outside along the canvass routes.



Many of Philly Counts' community partner organizations also organized tabling events outside of their site or in high traffic areas around the city, such as transit stops. They utilized the same promotional items to attract pedestrians and encourage census participation with all the people they encountered.

Having high-quality items that people needed, such as masks and hand sanitizer, helped facilitate conversations during canvassing and walking around neighborhoods. The swag and PPE, in conjunction with door hangers, were key organizing tools throughout the summer.



Census at Points of Service

As the pandemic continued into the summer, PPE such as masks and hand sanitizer were in high demand. Philly Counts invested in high quality cloth masks and alcohol-based hand sanitizer to support census outreach efforts. By pairing much needed PPE with information about the census, Philly Counts was building trust and connecting COVID-19 recovery to census completion.

Community partnerships were crucial to effectively distribute materials to the people in the community on a daily basis, helping elevate the work of organizations while furthering the goal of census education and participation.



Philly Counts partnered with over 100 organizations and volunteers to distribute material during the months of May through September. In total, Philly Counts distributed over 9,000 masks, 11,000 individual hand sanitizers, and 7,000 tote bags with census QR codes to historically undercounted communities.

Notably, in partnership with University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, Philly Counts supplied masks and census educational palm cards for their COVID-19 kits, given out to residents in undercounted neighborhoods in West Philadelphia.

Another key partnership was with organizations addressing food insecurity. Philly Counts worked with SHARE Food Program to include census information in food boxes and directly with the City's food distribution warehouse, hand placing over 100,000 census informational items - including palm cards, stickers, and doorhangers - into meal boxes being delivered to distribution sites.

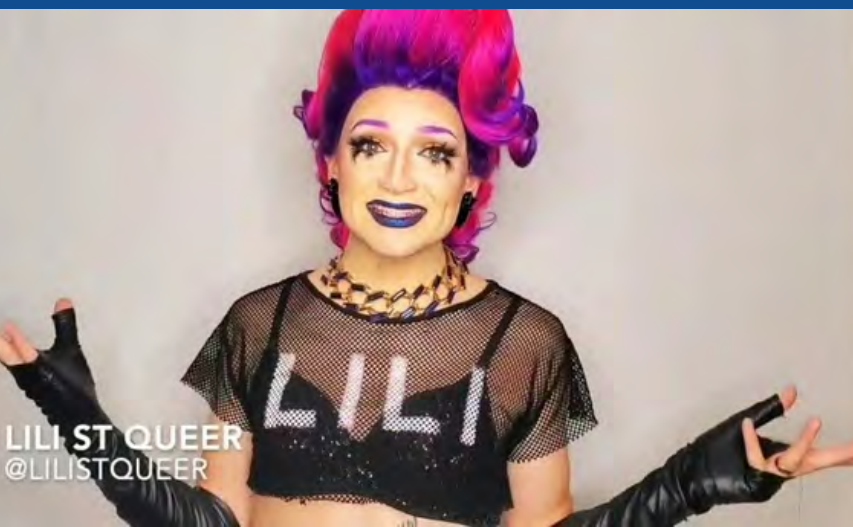
Philly Counts also provided census literature to the **School District of Philadelphia** to distribute at their technology centers and free student meal sites at schools. The collateral distributed included one-pagers, palm cards, and stickers, as well as educational literature about COVID-19 on behalf of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.



Liberty Resources included census information with their food distribution to help reach people with disabilities.

Philly Counts worked with subcommittee members to build a map, using American Community Survey data, of individuals who identified as having a disability, and if so, what type of disability.

William Way worked with **Drag Queens Lili S.t Queer and Eric Jaffe** to produce a video ad-campaign to help reach the queer community and to address concerns specific to this community.



Mobile Internet Access for Census Completion

Building on census engagement at points of service.



Philly Counts was granted 20 iPads from Comcast, a corporate partner, to provide residents who lack internet access the opportunity to complete the census online.

While giving out masks, hand sanitizer, and census literature, Philly Counts staff helped people fill out the census at food distribution sites and other points of service locations, including the Department of Motor Vehicles. This allowed Philly Counts to provide residents in some of the most historically undercounted neighborhoods with much-needed PPE as well as the chance to complete the census at over 100 census completion events.

Philly Counts worked with a number of community partners, like Casa Dominicana and ACANA, to lend out tablets and Chromebooks to expand their reach into more neighborhoods. In the six weeks that the tablets were in use, Philly Counts helped 631 households access the internet to complete the 2020 Census for their families.

Understanding that each conversation is an opportunity to address the intersection of needs, these tablets were also set up to allow people to register to vote, as well as have meaningful conversations with countless residents about the importance of the census, COVID-19 resources, and how to access other city services.

Similar to our efforts to provide internet access at service locations, Census Bureau workers provided Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA) to assist residents with completing the census online. Census Bureau MQA staff regularly set up tables at Philadelphia supermarkets, social service provider locations, and community events.



Philly Counts worked closely with the Philadelphia Regional Census Center's partnership specialists to identify and coordinate MQA events with over 30 partner organizations and the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau's MQA program was a critical element of the strategy used to increase self-response rates in the final weeks leading up to the end of the self-response period in October.

Advertising

"It was easy, I liked the variety - you can target the message to different groups. Nice to be able to pick and choose and share."

- **Patti Tahan**

Philly Counts launched an advertising campaign using print, radio, and television advertising to ensure that the 2020 Census was promoted on all available media platforms. This advertising campaign aimed to amplify the Census Bureau's marketing efforts.

The television commercial used was created by Philly CAM (Community Access Media), the non-profit operator of the City of Philadelphia's public access television network. The 30-second commercial featured local Philadelphia community leaders emphasizing the importance of participating in the census. This commercial ran on 5 different television stations in both English and Spanish. A radio commercial was also launched across 4 different local radio stations.

In addition to television and radio, print advertising was used to promote the 2020 Census. The ad ran 33 times in both English and Spanish publications with the graphics and text designed by our communications staff and reviewed by a working group composed of community volunteers and partners. Our Communications Working Group helped ensure that our advertisements were culturally competent, eye-catching, and informative.

Despite not having Philly Counts 2020 social media accounts, staff utilized City resources, paid-advertising, and organic social media sharing to promote the 2020 Census. This included over one million digital impressions from paid advertising, Facebook and Instagram Live interviews, and an active (and popular) social media toolkit.

"It was extremely useful to have the unified message. Every toolkit we got we used and shared". - **Adam Feldman**

Advertising Impressions

Television Advertising	Radio Advertising	Print Advertising	Digital Advertising
575 commercials	539 commercials	33 ads placed	more than 1 million commercials

Key Partnerships

There were many key partnerships that increased the reach and capacity of Philly Counts. Through the work of the Municipal Subcommittee, many City agencies came together and everyone utilized their network and resources to get the word out about the census.



Philly Counts worked with **Philadelphia Parks and Recreation** to train all of their front facing staff as census champions so they could inform the public about the importance of the census and how to respond. The recreation centers were an excellent resource for Philly Counts and partner organizations to host Census Champion trainings for the public. Philly Counts provided promotional materials to be posted at all of the sites in historically undercounted neighborhoods.

Additionally, the City's Playstreets program, run by Parks and Recreation, proved to be a critical partner to get information out into communities post the stay-at-home order. Playstreets are established by the City to ensure that children, particularly in low-income areas, have safe places to play by closing the block to traffic during the day and appointing a playstreet captain. The City also provides meals for the children who come to the play street and some streets receive toys and activities.

Philly Counts packed more than 1,500 tote bags with census promotional materials and a coloring activity page (designed by the Free Library) and coordinated with the playstreet deliveries so all of the children registered at the 51 *super-playstreets (areas designated as the highest need - aligning with our targeted audience of historically undercounted) could pick up the bags when they collected their food. The goal of these swag bags was to teach the children about the census through the activity sheet and encourage them to talk about the census and share the information with their parents.

The **Philadelphia Free Library** was another example of an outstanding and impactful partnership. The Free Library, in addition to having Philly Counts train all their front facing staff as Census Champions, were reliable sites for census champion trainings in every neighborhood and hosted a standing training weekly at the main branch. The sites also collected Commit to Count postcards and posted promotional materials. Additionally, the Free Library designed, with information and input from Philly Counts, materials that could be used internally for the hundreds of library staff and volunteers, and materials for an external audience of library users.

The Free Library also initiated, with the **University of the Arts**, a design charrette process for art students to design and test a hyper local census awareness campaign. The students met with Philly Counts and Free Library Staff to learn the operational and logistical information they needed and then created slogans, designed brochures, hand outs, and activities which were tested at select libraries. The student's presentations were thoughtful, creative, and replicable tools for engagement that would have been integrated into the overall outreach campaign.

After preliminary planning conversations with Philly Counts and learning that children ages 0-5 were the most forgotten about on the census, the **Department of Human Services (DHS)** immediately recognized their team could have the most impact by ensuring that all of their partner agencies and staff were well trained and understood where children should be counted in various stages of their housing circumstances. DHS, using information provided by Philly Counts, designed materials that were relevant and appropriate both for the social service workers spreading the information as well as to be shared with the parents and foster parents. DHS leadership also encouraged social workers to let families use their device to complete the census while on their home visits.

All of these partnerships and many more were essential to leveraging existing communication platforms, networks, and resources on this engagement campaign.



Philly Counts worked with the **Philadelphia Water Department** to put census information in the water bills sent to every Philadelphia Water Department customer. Philly Counts designed an insert to be included in both the mailer and the electronic bill notifications in April 2020.

The Philly Counts team worked with the **Philadelphia Block Captain Program** to create and send a mailing to thousands of block captains across the city.

Philly Counts and **Mural Arts Philadelphia (MAP)** collaborated on a social contest to help spread the word to MAP's tens of thousands of social media followers.

Townwatch and Integrated Services supported material distribution at community meetings across the city. Philly 311 trained all of their call agents as Census Champions early on and updated their agent scripts to reflect accurate information about the 2020 Census.

Philly Counts connected with the **University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing** through the COVID-19 Community Response Captain Training. Students were eager to get involved with Philly Counts, and with their field knowledge, the phone banking program was the perfect fit, especially as it tied COVID-19 check-ins to census. Philly Counts started by training all participating students on the phone banking process and adding every participant to the existing Philly Counts phone banking network. Overall, University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing students contributed 6,377 calls to Philly Counts outreach to undercounted communities across Philadelphia.

The partnership expanded to incorporate census material distribution as well. Over the summer, University of Pennsylvania Nursing assembled COVID-19 kits to distribute to communities at risk in West Philadelphia and reached out to Philly Counts to incorporate census awareness in the packages. Philly Counts provided 1,000 branded tote bags, 1,000 masks, and census informational palm cards that were included in the COVID-19 kits and given to community members in at-risk and low responding neighborhoods.



Text banking

A last minute text program was made possible by a generous donation from the Haas Family Foundation and in partnership with the Philadelphia Urban League. This tactic was considered in earlier outreach planning, but was not implemented due to budget constraints.

Text banking took place
October 14 - October 15, 2020.



	October 13	October 14	October 15	October 16
Philadelphia Self-Response Rate	56.4%	56.5%	56.6%	56.9%
Change in Self-Response Rate	---	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%

Immediately following the text bank program, the change in response rate was 3 times the daily increase over the previous 2 days.

0.1% represents approximately 600 households participating.

On October 16th, there was an increase of 0.3% approximately 1,800 households.

This program allowed for nearly 1 million text messages to be sent over the last two days that the census was live to remind people there is still time to complete the 2020 Census.



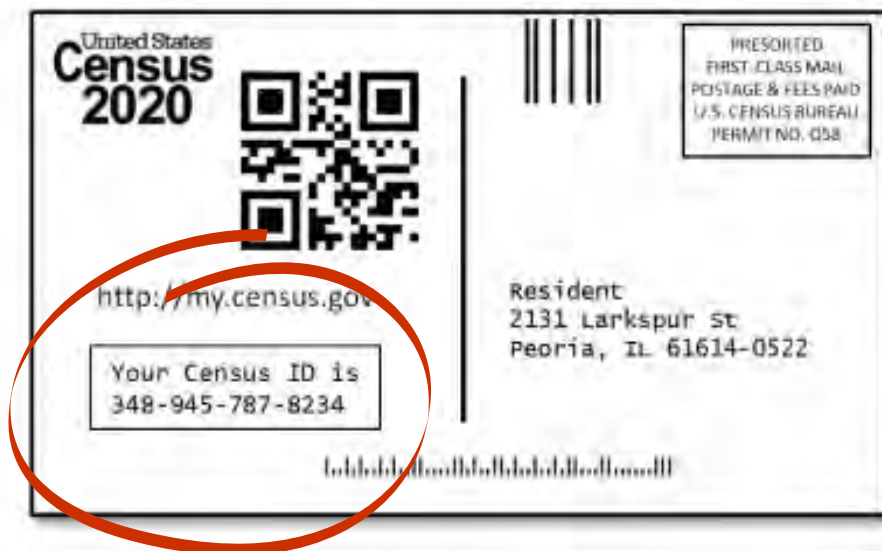
Self-Response Rates

& THE NON-ID RESPONSE DILEMMA

At the time of this report publishing, the City of Philadelphia ended with an overall final self-response rate of 56.9%, a drop from 2010's final self-response rate of 62.4%. However, due to census operational challenges endemic to the 2020 Census, the self-response rates currently published do not provide an accurate accounting of self-response in Philadelphia.

Self-response was calculated based households completing the census either by a paper form mailed to their address, or by going online to 2020census.gov and verifying their address with a unique identifier code. This unique identifier code was mailed to households at the opening of the self-response period.

If a household did not receive a unique identifier code, they could go online and submit their address to the Census Bureau's system. If the responses from these households did not conform with the address the Census Bureau had on record, these responses went into a queue to later be verified by census staff. These responses were termed "non-ID responses". Non-ID responses were not added into self-response rates if the address required verification b



Philadelphia has seen a rapid pace of new development over the past decade.⁹ The pace of new development, including many conversions from single-family homes or the rezoning of other buildings into apartment or multi-family units, ranks Philadelphia second among all U.S. cities for rates of apartment conversions.¹⁰

Throughout the self-response period, Philly Counts encountered numerous instances of residents reporting that they had difficulty completing the census, with the online form not recognizing their address. A high rate of non-conforming addresses from household self-responses would have a disproportional and negative impact on Philadelphia's self-response rates.

Responses from 35,020 phone conversations revealed that 15.1% of people stated they never received an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census.



Since the invitation was the only way to receive a unique ID, these households were unable to enter that information when completing the census. If their address did not match the Census Bureau record in any way, that self-initiated response was not attributed to self-response rates.

At various points throughout the self-response period, Philly Counts attempted to identify how many households were in the queue to be verified, and the Census Bureau was repeatedly unable to provide an answer. If self-response is how local success is determined, the reported self-response rate must accurately reflect the number of people who were responsive to local efforts to get out the count. This includes responses that were submitted with unverified addresses.

Without having an accurate accounting of self-response rates throughout the self-response period, Philly Counts, and all local efforts, relied on incomplete data to establish and implement its strategy.

The requirement that a non-ID response household might need its address verified by the Census Bureau makes the household's response no less initiated by a respondent. This is a significant flaw in the accounting of self-response rates and deserves a further review from the Census Bureau in advance of the 2030 Census.

Findings

Debrief Survey

Philly Counts created a google survey to capture the feedback of Philly Counts programs and tactics to increase participation in the 2020 Census.

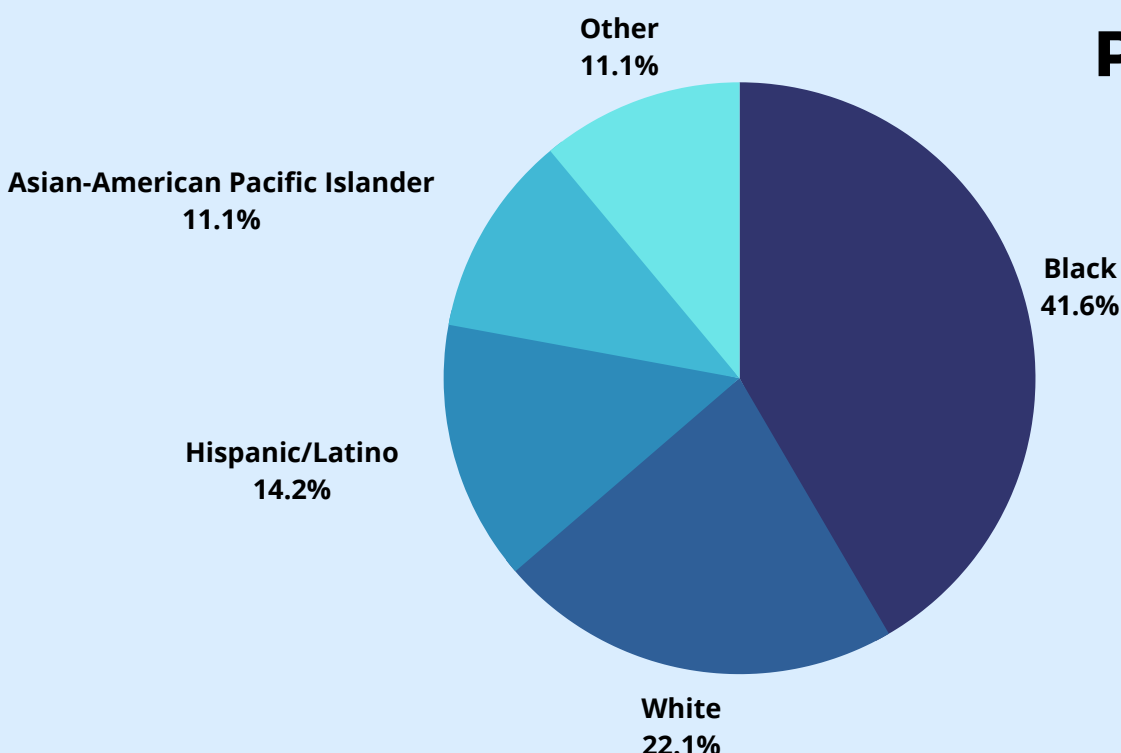
The survey was sent out to the entire mailing list which includes every person involved in the engagement plan.

Focus Groups

In December 2020, Philly Counts hosted virtual focus groups with anyone who had been involved with Philly Counts.

Participants included Philly Counts partners and volunteers sharing personal experiences from working with Philly Counts on the 2020 Census and honest feedback and recommendations for the next census.

Philly Counts staff held these group sessions addressing different aspects of Philly Counts' engagement and outreach plan: communications, community engagement, data, and multicultural. Reference to focus groups in this report signifies a thought or idea shared by a participant during a particular session.



Philly Counts Final Survey

Philadelphians who participated in our final survey reflected the racial & ethnic demographics of the city at large

Total Survey Responses: 180

Implications

The combined work of the Philly Counts network both proved the impact of collective action at the neighborhood and city level, and also encouraged residents to become more deeply engaged with civic action in Philadelphia. The engagement tools built on existing civic infrastructure and created a direct pipeline for information sharing between trusted messengers, Philly Counts, and local government.

Philly Counts was tasked with increasing participation in the 2020 Census. While the final numbers were below 2010 response rates, we believe that participation would have been substantially lower without this coordinated effort.

Careful evaluation of similar cities shows that Philadelphians did not respond at equal rates to the mail invitations sent by the Census Bureau. In early April, Philadelphia trailed Baltimore by 1% and Detroit by .2%.

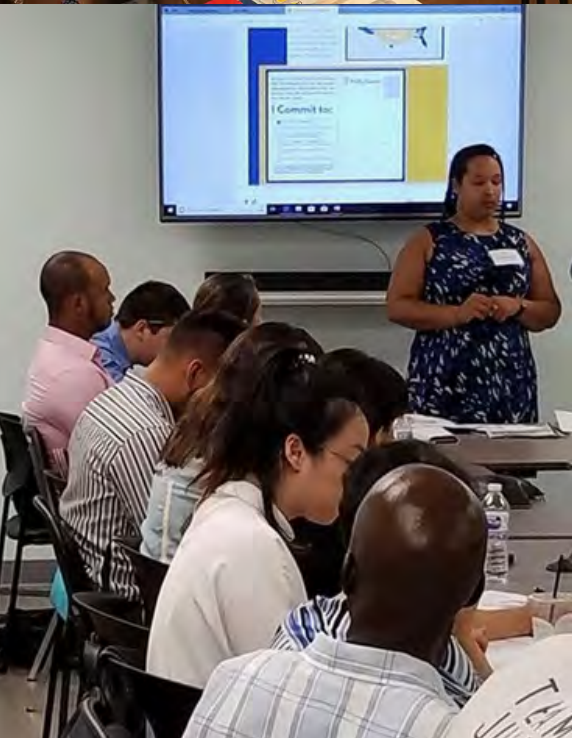
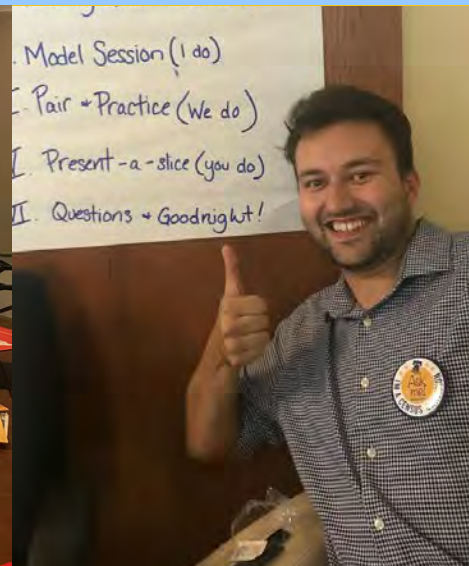
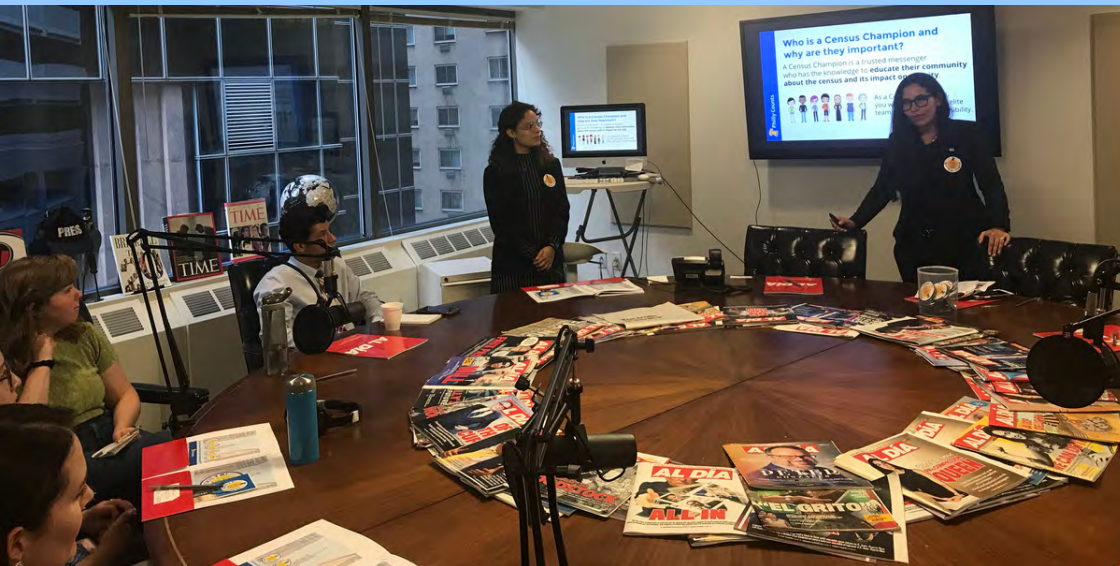
However, over time, Philly Counts focused on one-to-one conversations and partnering with trusted community leaders to persuade historically undercounted communities to participate. This work led to nearly closing the gap with Baltimore, ending a mere .1% behind, and surpassing Detroit by 5.9%.

Throughout this campaign, there were many things that went well, and some that did not. The following are implications for future decennial census efforts.

Implications from Philly Counts 2020 include:

1. Community engagement must start earlier for 2030.
2. A close relationship with the local Census Bureau staff proved vital.
3. Flaws in the national Census Bureau plan had direct local impacts.
4. Create partnerships and raise funds to support outreach and engagement.
5. Partner with elected officials to maximize local impact.
6. Authentic engagement requires a financial investment .
7. Successful engagement must acknowledge racial histories.
8. Digital access is an equity issue that deserves funding and attention.
9. Leverage established networks to build trust in communities.
10. Diverse communities and neighborhoods require focused and integrated engagement.

Implication 1: Community Engagement Must Start Earlier for 2030



Philly Counts conducted a digital debrief survey that was sent out to all partners and volunteers in December 2020. A central theme across all survey responses and focus groups is that an immense amount of work went into building this network of leaders across the city. In focus groups, many participants spoke of the need to start earlier in 2030. Some suggested an additional year in advance and many asked that the network continue working together on other issues, always looking to the 2030 Census.





Implication 2: Local Census Bureau Relationship Proved Vital

Philly Counts had a close working relationship with the Regional Census Bureau office from the beginning.

The local team consistently went the extra mile, meeting with Philly Counts on a weekly basis to plan and evaluate.

These meetings were beneficial for both teams, allowing the Census Bureau to share information that helped guide outreach efforts and focus, as well as relay new guidelines from officials at the federal level. In turn, Philly Counts was able to share progress and upcoming plans that local census staff could be involved in to promote census participation.

The partnership with the Regional Census Bureau office was also critical in planning and implementing the Mobile Questionnaire Assistance program (MQA). Throughout the length of the program, Philly Counts collaborated with senior Regional Census Bureau staff frequently - even daily - to strategically plan MQA events and conducted joint outreach to ensure that MQA was occurring in the most undercounted census tracts throughout the city.



Implication 3: Flaws in the National Census Bureau Plan had Direct Local Impact

There were severe operational challenges with the 2020 Census. The regional Census Bureau staff did their best to mitigate the effects of poor planning and decision making from national Census Bureau leadership and the federal administration. These administrative decisions were identified as major barriers by national census advocates such as Census Counts and verified by members of the National Cities Count Coalition. The National Urban League also produced a study identifying these challenges were most pronounced in the efforts to count communities of color.¹¹



A major flaw in Census Bureau operations was the disorganized recruitment, hiring, and training of enumerators. Philly Counts worked with partners to push recruitment for the hundreds of enumerator positions and received substantial feedback from people who applied but either did not hear back for weeks or months, were not receiving updates throughout the hiring process, or the training sessions did not meet the safety standards and protocols after COVID-19 safety restrictions went into effect. This meant that many people who wanted to work were never called in for duty, resulting in a shortage of enumerators for key neighborhoods despite a successful recruitment effort.



Implication 3: Flaws in the National Census Bureau Plan had Direct Local Impact

The Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA) process was slow to start, even accounting for the impact of COVID-19, and did not cover a broad enough area, nor was there enough time spent on this program to effectively assist every community that needed it.

To supplement the MQA operation, Philly Counts sent staff to points of service and parks where people congregate with tablets and found that this was by far the most effective way to get people to complete the questionnaire, meeting people where they are. Looking forward, MQA should be launched much earlier in the operation and more enumerators should be designated for this task.

According to 2010 debrief documents, the Census Bureau had more than 100 satellite office locations in neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia. Those offices were open for several weeks, making boxes of extra forms and literature easily accessible. A similar model should be used for MQA in future years.

MQA should be launched much earlier in the operation and more enumerators should be designated for this task.

In late summer of 2020, the Census Bureau found more than 16 million additional forms that had never been mailed to households. Local and national advocates pushed for the Census Bureau to send them out, encouraging a focus on lowest response households with limited access to the internet in their home (internet-choice tracts).

The Census Bureau released a statement¹² announcing that they would be sending a seventh mailing to low-responding households. The expectation was that these additional forms would go to the lowest response tracts across the country. In Philadelphia, the lowest response tracts overlapped with the internet choice tracts where households were known to have the lowest access to the internet.

After the additional forms were mailed, the Census Bureau released the list of tracts included in the seventh mailing. The Census Bureau made a pointed decision to send additional paper forms to **internet-first** households with low response rates.

The households without access to the internet, who needed the paper survey the most, were excluded from this opportunity to receive an extra paper form. In the future, paper forms should be prioritized for tracts with the lowest access to the internet. Equitable systems for participation must consider that these households are least likely to have another way to participate.

Implication 4: Create Partnerships and Raise Funds to Support Census Outreach and Engagement



Philly Counts, in partnership with Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia to create an Action Fund which raised \$750,000 for micro-grants to local organizations to support census outreach.

Knowing that some of the best trusted messengers are part of community based organizations, it was critical to support this work. The community of practice created with the grantees was key to deep engagement and should be considered in future years.





Implication 5: Partner Closely with Local Elected Officials for Maximum Impact

Local elected officials throughout Philadelphia have the networks, resources, and expertise to be strong advocates for their communities.

Throughout the course of Philly Counts' census engagement campaign, local elected officials stepped up time and again to ensure the residents in their districts were counted in the 2020 Census

Elected officials partnered with Philly Counts to host Census Caravans - a parade of cars through neighborhoods with signs and a loudspeaker to help raise awareness about the census and how to respond. When possible, volunteers would hop in and out of the cars to hand out promotional materials such as swag and palm cards. Philly Counts would work with officials to plan the route, promote the event, and to provide materials to distribute. Philly Counts staff would also participate in the caravans.



Implication 5: Partner Closely with Local Elected Officials for Maximum Impact

Additionally, elected officials volunteered to canvass neighborhoods in their districts with doorhangers, provided educational material to their constituents and promoted participation during community meetings, interviews, and across their social accounts.



Building relationships and engaging with Philadelphia's local, state, and federal elected officials allowed Philly Counts to have strong census advocates and active volunteers throughout the 2020 Census community engagement campaign.



Implication 6: Authentic Engagement Requires a Financial Investment

Philly Counts' success was a direct result of the deliberate decision to use a community organizing approach to public engagement for the 2020 Census.

Authentic and effective community organizing is labor-intensive and often under-resourced, and the diverse coalitions and trusted messenger program that Philly Counts oversaw were not created easily, quickly, or cheaply. The civic infrastructure constructed by Philly Counts was built with person-to-person outreach, one conversation at a time.

Philly Counts spanned two separate fiscal years during its 2020 Census engagement campaign. Philly Counts was allocated \$947,700 in FY20, an additional \$172,000 in a mid year transfer, and \$387,166 in FY21, for a total of \$1,506,866 invested by the City of Philadelphia for community engagement and organizing around the 2020 Census.

This funding went towards a mix of salary, administrative costs, contracts and services, and promotional material. Philly Counts also received competitive grant funding from the National League of Cities.

Despite the amount of time and money budgeted for this work, Philly Counts still struggled to effectively engage every neighborhood. Successful community engagement campaigns require significant funding, and a larger budget for the 2030 Census engagement campaign is recommended for consideration. The importance of sufficiently funding community engagement cannot be understated. Genuine relationships and sustainable civic infrastructure require meaningful and long-term investment, and underfunding this investment cannot provide the return that city leaders and residents alike rightfully demand.



Implication 7: Successful Engagement Must Acknowledge Racial Histories

The treatment of black people and other people of color by the government is a shameful part of America's social context. For hundreds of years the government has sanctioned the exploitation and dehumanization of people of color (and black males in particular) through slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, building inequitable public school systems, manipulation of the justice system, profiteering from the prison-industrial complex, and police brutality; all of these practices and more shape interactions between communities of color and government. The vision of Philly Counts was built around the belief that the community's distrust in government must be addressed by providing space for open, honest dialogue and for people to be involved in government in a meaningful way.

In the first census, the three-fifths compromise dictated that black people would count in the census as three-fifths of a person. Considering distrust in government, low literacy rates, access to the internet, and more, it becomes evident that the black community should have its own strategy for outreach and activation and that this should be given plenty of time and consideration.



Implication 7: Successful Engagement Must Acknowledge Racial Histories



Funding and resources should be invested heavily in organizing the Black community, with and by the Black community, to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the census, and other efforts that affect their community.

According to census data, in Philadelphia, the Black community makes up 44% of the population, the largest racial group in the city. A complex, nuanced, and comprehensive plan is required to reach people, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Cultural competency and social and historical context are key to understanding and connecting with different communities. Too often, organizing strategies lump people of color into one group and the engagement plan, as a result, is deeply flawed at its foundation. While there is benefit of bringing various racial and ethnic groups together around a common agenda, as evidenced in focus group discussions, it is equally important to know when to differentiate groups from the same community to allow building specific approaches for their particular communities.

This engagement must be done with transparency and equal access to resources to execute strategies aimed at identified needs. A common reflection shared among focus group participants was the gratification of working with different organizations, serving different communities, and coming together with one goal.



Implication 8: Digital Access is an Equity Issue that Deserves Funding and Attention

During phone banking to residents, Philly Counts staff came to better understand the complexity of access to the internet. Often, residents would say they had internet on their phones, but would not have sufficient internet to complete a government form because their phone did not have the technology required, such as lacking a full keyboard or having a very small screen. This is a critical differentiation which had profound effects throughout the pandemic.

Food sites were mapped online, stimulus checks required (for some) completing an IRS form online, the phone line for jobless benefits was overwhelmed leaving people with only an internet option to apply, and the Census Bureau relied on an internet first approach. At the same time, non-profit computer labs, libraries, and keyspots which provide critical internet access to families in the digital divide were closed indefinitely due to the pandemic.

While there were obvious benefits to an internet-first approach, the assumption by the U.S. Census Bureau that they could drastically cut resources from the field operation because the census could easily be completed online was dangerously short sighted.

Community organizations serving the most marginalized people - often people of color - are disadvantaged due to a lack of resources for reaching, communicating, and tracking the people they serve.

As technological advances are made more common and government services become reliant on access to technology, these organizations and the communities they serve face further disenfranchisement. Making information accessible only by digital means does little to help our most disenfranchised communities if they do not have reliable access to the internet.

Running an internet-first census campaign creates an undue burden for communities who already struggle with the myriad issues stemming from deep poverty. Further relying on the internet to establish self-response rates will deepen the systemic inequities that cities face as a result of the census. If the Census Bureau is going to push an internet-first approach in the next census, Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA) and other programs aimed to increase access must be more prominent in the operational plan.



Implication 9: Leverage Established Networks to Build Trust in Communities

In debrief focus groups, participants collectively agreed that the trusted messenger model was an effective tool in building trust in the community.

Through Census Champion trainings, people were taught information, how to share that information, and inspired to take action after the training. Partners were offered access to materials and invited to join a community of people working towards a shared goal.

This trusted messenger model was particularly influential due to the distrust of government because, in the model, community members were not receiving critical information about the census from a government official but from a person they trust, such as a family member, a neighbor, a friend.

As noted by John Chin, Executive Director of Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, “having a relationship is helpful to convincing people to fill out the census” as opposed to “having strangers do this job can be very limiting compared to trusted messengers.”

“I appreciate that Philly Counts had different communities involved in developing strategy, marketing, and promotion for messaging the importance of 2020 Census participation. The various community members and leaders you engaged truly know their residents, thus the messaging created spoke to residents in their own words and language.”

Community Outreach Representative for Philadelphia Works

The trusted messenger model provided individuals, who may not have been involved with local government before, a way to get involved and build trust, but it also amplifies the census message and mission.

Philly Counts staff hosted focus groups with the community to receive feedback on design, language, and messaging.

Additionally, the phone banking program had a trauma-informed approach that helped people feel valued, their needs recognized, and trust the caller.



Implication 10: Diverse Communities and Neighborhoods Require Focused and Integrated Engagement



Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods and each neighborhood must be engaged in a unique way. This requires thoughtful engagement options, genuine opportunities for input, and plenty of time. It is critical that the staff of engagement initiatives reflect the demographic of the community they serve, both for trust building and cultural context when planning and working with diverse and sensitive communities.

The legacy documents from the 2010 Census suggested focused organizing through the Complete Count Committee and its 19 subcommittees. As Philly Counts built out the network for the 2020 Census, they followed this roadmap. Although this approach showed success in some areas of engagement, it became clear from the engagement data that focusing on constituency groups left holes in some key target neighborhoods that were not getting focused outreach early on. After a few months of subcommittees meeting on a regular basis, Philly Counts decided to add a regional organizing strategy to ensure they were reaching all historically undercounted neighborhoods.

Regional organizing complemented and expanded the reach in diverse communities across the city. The Philly Counts team quickly layered a regional approach to all organizing and started to find partners in neighborhoods where they had no contacts.

Any approach to organizing must include a deep understanding of each neighborhood and thoughtful outreach to key community leaders. It is critical to understand where people are already convening, meet them where they are, and build upon their work. When engaging diverse communities, it is important to be evaluating processes and strategies and adjusting as necessary, even if this means changing the entire plan. Similar thoughts were shared during focus groups.



Implication 10: Diverse Communities and Neighborhoods Require Focused and Integrated Engagement



A Census Champion training participant and volunteer shared, “the Census Champions could have been more effective if we tied the Champions into doing things in their neighborhoods.” Pre-pandemic plans would have leveraged Census Champions for Action Days in the summer. Ideas like this are strongly encouraged for the 2030 Census.

When organizing the Limited English Proficient and immigrant community, it is essential that language access be at the forefront of planning. According to a 2019 Pew study, 14% of Philadelphia residents were immigrants and 23% spoke a foreign language at home.¹⁴

At the onset of the Philly Counts office, Philly Counts and partners on the Complete Count Committee thought it was essential to have staff fluent in the most spoken languages in Philadelphia. Philly Counts hired staff fluent in Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, and French. Philly Counts worked closely with community organizations serving non-English speaking populations through subcommittee meetings to incorporate language access needs with the limited resources available.

An understanding of appropriate messaging and community input in materials is an important component to a thoughtful language access approach.

Final Thoughts

Philly Counts has heard from individuals during field outreach, community meetings, and focus groups, that often when the government reaches out, it is with a specific purpose and once they have what they need, they disappear until the next initiative.

One focus group participant and member of the African community in Philadelphia shared the community's feeling of being an afterthought, saying this is "not because people don't reach out, but because it may not be consistent, genuine, or trustworthy." Changing this dynamic and establishing values of consistency and authenticity were the core of all Philly Counts outreach and engagement. The participant encouraged Philly Counts to continue supporting the network of volunteers and partners with whom they had effectively built trust.

There is an overwhelming request among focus group participants and survey respondents to keep the Philly Counts network alive for the 2030 Census and other key engagement initiatives while continuing to build relationships throughout Philadelphia's diverse communities. Philly Counts created the infrastructure that allowed this network to grow, and the communities that Philly Counts had the opportunity to serve strengthened and expanded the network beyond what was thought possible at the onset of this work.

Simply put, the success of Philly Counts exists only through the hard work and efforts of countless volunteers and community leaders. Losing this network is not only a loss to the city and efforts to effectively share information and build a relationship with residents, it is also a loss for the residents who invested time, energy, and resources into their communities.



“We could shift to general civic engagement promotion: voter registration, volunteering opportunities and pathways... We can build more experience running engagement events and making more partners, so... we always have a partner in the loop... I would really hate to see the office shut down and have to restart in 9 years,”

Partner at University of
Pennsylvania School of Nursing

The Philly Counts community engagement model helped make City services more accessible while also empowering residents to take action and be agents of change in their communities. The civic infrastructure created as part of the 2020 Census in Philadelphia has become about much more than just the census, with its influence impacting COVID-19 engagement, mutual aid efforts, and the 2020 General Election.

The past year has shown that when local government invests in its residents, its residents invest time and resources back into the city. This produces a type of social contract that creates an opportunity for the City of Philadelphia – and municipal governments everywhere that are willing to invest the time, energy, and funds into engaging their communities –to address the generations of trauma inflicted upon Philadelphia communities.

Now more than ever, it is crucial that the government honor the investment of time and resources that these community members have put into supporting their communities throughout Philly Counts’ 2020 Census engagement campaign, and take up the challenge of this moment to drive impactful change throughout Philadelphia.



Complete Count Committee

This work would not have been possible without the Complete Count Committee, led by Mayor Kenney and Stephanie Reid, Executive Director of Philly Counts. They laid the foundation that extended this work into Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Thank you to the honorary co-chairs:

Representative Dwight Evans

Senator Christine Tartaglione

Representative Mary Gay Scanlon

Representative Jason Dawkins

Representative Brendan Boyle

Councilmember Derek Green

Thank you to the subcommittee chairs:

Reverend Alyn Waller, Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church

Reverend Bonnie Camarda, Salvation Army

Brian Abernathy, City of Philadelphia,, Managing Director's Office

Daniel Hilferty, Independence Blue Cross

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Kelvin Jeremiah, Philadelphia Housing Authority

Reverend Dr. Lorina Marshall-Blake, Vine Memorial Baptist Church

Maria Gonzalez, HACE CDC

Nancy Dung-Nguyen, VietLead

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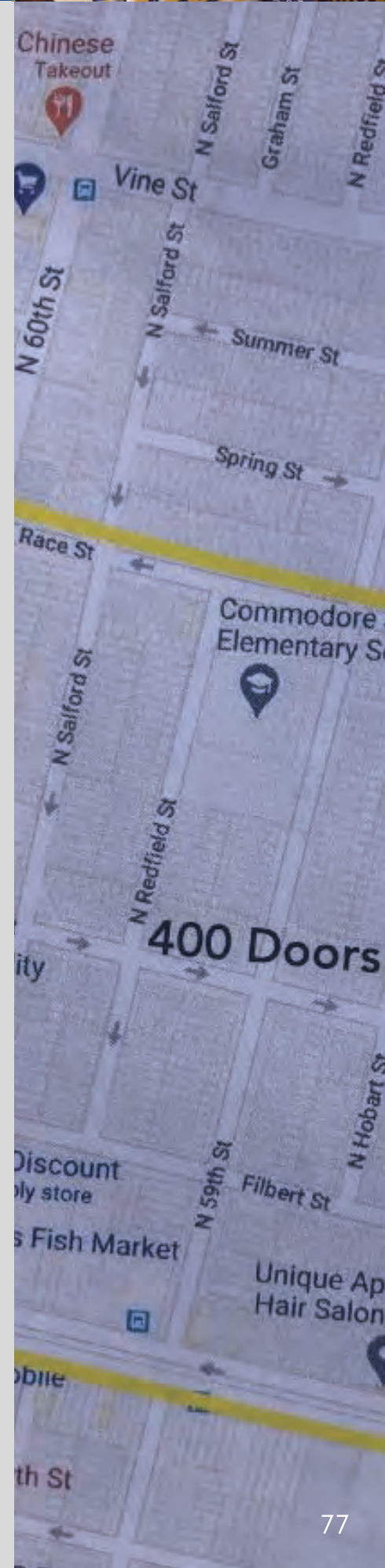
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For supplemental information, including graphs, advertising content, and action fund grantees, please see our appendix at www.phila.gov/documents/philly-counts-2020-final-report/

