

## Executive Summary: Recommendations for 2030 Census

**This summary recaps lessons learned from Alaska Counts, a statewide, multi-sector, nonpartisan education initiative spearheaded by the Alaska Census Working Group in preparation for the 2020 Census.**

Knowing that Alaska is one of the most difficult states to count in the constitutionally mandated decennial U.S. Census and that every business, nonprofit, and individual in Alaska is impacted by decisions that last a decade, the Working Group was formed to advocate for a fair and accurate count across Alaska – with an emphasis on the hardest places to get a full count. Even though we were thwarted by a global pandemic, our efforts will have a lasting impact on Alaska in the preservation and future use of all of the information, materials, translation, and programs we created for our state.

The importance of Census data cannot be understated. It is ubiquitous in our daily lives influencing federal funding for housing and healthcare, roads and other critical infrastructure; helping us plan for the future, from government entities to nonprofits and businesses; and allowing the process of redrawing legislative districts and local political boundaries that affect political representation for a decade.

The Foraker Group, the state nonprofit association, conceived of the Alaska Census Working Group model and quickly activated it with its partner Cook Inlet Housing Authority. Together, these two organizations devoted money and staffing to bring the statewide Working Group together. To date, no other coalition like it had existed in Alaska or anywhere in the country. The Working Group is now a recognized model in and outside Alaska by the U.S. Census Bureau and other civic action groups for how diverse perspectives can come together for lasting change.

The Working Group began with a multi-year strategic advocacy effort focused on 1) educating policymakers on the importance of accurate Census data and advocating for sufficient federal and state resources to support operations, and 2) connecting with the Census Bureau to address critical tribal and technical issues presented by our unique state. In 2018, The Working Group designed and launched a fully branded “get out the count” education and action campaign called Alaska Counts with a website, logo, and communication materials, including translated information for businesses, tribes, nonprofits, and governments to use at no cost. Over the course of 16 months, Alaska Counts led communications, language access, and direct outreach for 2020 Census activities in Alaska.

Believing that local communities and local leaders know best how to activate their citizenry for a complete count, the Working Group focused on creating branded and connected materials that could be adapted by **local advocates** who served as trusted community leaders. Some accomplishments and lessons worth noting include:

- **We raised money for the statewide effort from national funders** who recognized Alaska’s impact and challenges and shared those resources across the state in a variety of forms.

- **We dedicated energy early on to distilling and communicating the tangible community impacts** from local funding that is determined by the Census.
- **We filled gaps in the Census Bureau's recruitment effort** by frequent communication on our job platforms and social media about which rural communities needed more Census workers.
- **We worked closely with the federal delegation** to raise Alaska specific issues and strengthen our positions for change.
- **We worked closely with state and local governments** and Complete Count Committees to catalyze their allocation of resources and mobilize their efforts.
- **We hired people to patch Alaskans through to phone banks** where they could complete the Census.
- **We launched a mini-grant program** for nonprofits, tribes, complete count committees, and local governments to conduct Census outreach best tailored to their own community while supplying them with Alaska Counts materials for their local use.

None of this work would have been possible without a strong collaborative effort from the Working Group partners, funders, and the Alaska and U.S. Census Bureau team. While these are just a few highlights, we encourage you to read the full report on the steps we took and the lessons we learned on behalf of all Alaskans.

The Foraker Group is committed to maintaining the Alaska Counts website and all the materials of the Alaska Census Working Group for use in 2030 and beyond. We are stronger together – join us for future efforts.

We recognized that conducting a Census during a global pandemic had a dramatic impact on the count that will take a long time to fully understand. Barring those impacts, the following is a set of recommendations for both Census advocates and the Census Bureau in preparation for the 2030 Census.

### ***For Working Group and Census Advocates***

**By far, our greatest successes and our greatest lessons came from the opportunities that opened up to Alaska from establishing a single, statewide hub organization** that worked with partners, raised funds, and facilitated a network of people and organizations dedicated to supporting a full Census count. The Alaska Census Working Group will live on but it will need full participation from everyone interested in a full count in Alaska. If you are reading this from outside Alaska, we encourage you to start or join a statewide, multi-sector, nonpartisan effort.

**While the work has different stages – many of which last the whole decade – activating a working group needs to start at least four years before the count, or 2026 for the 2030 Census.** It is never too early to start preparing for the next Census. Relationship and trust-building exercises take time and represent essential groundwork for successful outreach and a robust Get-Out-the-Count effort. For outreach work to escalate quickly, coalitions must be in place and dollars must be raised to support activity. Start these activities early:

- **Identify and cultivate relationships** with local trusted community leaders.
- **Recruit community organizations and businesses** in hard-to-count communities first.
  - Example: CDQ organizations serve gravel-road communities with established internet cafes and have a shared understanding of the importance of the Census. Engage them early.
- **Organize and maintain communications** regarding the Census and its value with all organizations and partners between decennial Census counts.
  - Consolidate examples and provide educational materials for prospective partners that demonstrate in tangible ways how Census data is used.

- **Engage school districts at least one year in advance** for approval to incorporate Census education into curriculum and lesson plans.
- **Engage local Census workers** early and often, communicating planned outreach efforts so coordination becomes the norm.
- **Recommend to the Census Bureau early on that barcoded paper versions of the Census will prove a core part of operations in rural Alaska and roadless communities.** Keep remote community disparities in mind – there was barely 3G in many parts of the state in 2020 and it is unclear how much that will improve by 2030.
- Tailor the outreach budget to reflect the importance of **in-person outreach from local trusted voices**, a critical part of reaching rural communities.
- **Keep the mini-grant program** to spur local leadership and creative place-based solutions.
- Use the same process to **narrow down the issues for the Working Group** that we used in 2020 – see the full report for more information.
- **Consider supplementing in-person, mail, and digital outreach** with people hired to patch Alaskans through to phone banks to complete the Census in real time.
- **Be welcoming, open, and ready to partner with state and local governments and tribes** even if or when they create their own working groups. There will always be more work to do than any group can manage themselves.

### **For the Census Bureau**

We recognize the persistent and consistent efforts of the U.S. Census Bureau in doing a remarkably hard job even without a global pandemic to attend to. That said, and with much respect for all the positive work they did in Alaska and specifically with the Working Group, we offer this summary of concrete suggestions for 2030. We encourage the bureau team covering Alaska to read our full report.

- **Include PO boxes** in any mailed reminders or communications about the Census. Excluding people who receive mail at PO boxes denies critical communication with a significant portion of Alaskans in rural parts of the state, making efforts to reach those in hard-to-count communities more challenging, time-consuming, and expensive. The Working Group was able to send a handful of PO box mailings to augment the lack of communication from the Census Bureau but it would have been far more effective to use our resources as an addition to the work, not as a replacement.
- **Retain funding for the local champions** with travel stipends or honorariums for remote enumerators. These people serve as critical liaisons to villages across the state. Additionally, recruitment should begin much earlier.
- **Understand the power of paper-based data collection** for Census takers when conducting Remote Alaska/Update Leave/Update Enumerate and Non-Response Follow Up to ensure accuracy, timeliness, and validity of data collection, particularly in areas where broadband and cellular connectivity is a challenge. This ensures data is gathered sufficiently, accurately, and in a timely manner given the challenges of access/equity where PO box mailers to households is insufficient. At the same time it adheres to privacy and encryption measures that preserve personal information.

- **Ensure enumerators feel safe and secure as they conduct the count and execute non-response follow up** – that includes funding for compensation to hosts of nontraditional lodging options outside communities with hotels, B&B's, etc. especially for Remote Alaska/Update Leave/Update Enumerate operations in remote regions of the state.
- **Diversify media consultants** to ensure visuals effectively reach American Indian/Alaska Native populations. For example, a Hawaii-based firm was retained to reach Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in Hawaii but not in Alaska. Localized efforts are more effective because they feel more authentic to Alaskans and thus build the necessary trust for better participation.
- **Set translation goals high and include Alaska Native languages!** Expand translated materials into more than the 60 languages that were included in 2020. Adopt Indigenous and diverse language updates to modify existing documents that Alaska Counts created in 2020. Consider tribal areas or Indigenous language adoption as its own separate page in translation materials.
- **Encourage schools and school districts in urban areas to adopt the Statistics in Schools curriculum** far in advance of the decennial count to ensure students are aware of the Census. This is especially true for hard-to-count populations where language barriers often occur. The result will be more engagement that reaches across generational and digital divides.
- **Activate Mobile Questionnaire Assistance.** While the COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge during the 2020 Census, this program presented an opportunity to explore new ways to reach hard-to-count individuals. The use of the Mobile Questionnaire Assistance was critical at outreach events and with partners like food banks. It should continue in 2030.

Overall these recommendations focus on meeting Alaskans where they are during the Census enumeration rather than only focusing on a physical home or in a second language. Building trust with staff who are familiar with hard-to-count areas and urban diverse populations is essential. Providing language assistance to Census enumerators is also an essential recommendation. Overall the staffing was not adequate for a state like Alaska and every effort should be made to remedy this early for 2030.

We look forward to working with the U.S. Census Bureau and all entities that are interested in ensuring a fair and accurate count of Alaskans in 2030.

**For more information, please see our full report.** You will also find helpful information including the national evaluation and list of state-based reports and lessons learned from the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation. It is available online: ***Together We Count | Assessing Efforts to Support a Fair and Accurate 2020 Census.***