

MN Census 2020 Communication and Mobilization: Themes, "Message", and Message Content

In order to produce a plan that is grounded in rich perspective and deeper community input, we needed to expand the conversation beyond just the community leaders who were part of the Co-Creation Table creating this plan and their immediate connections. We wanted to include additional public sector stakeholders who have relationships with undercounted communities, and most importantly, from lay people who live in these communities but are not engaged in the public sector as part of their vocation. The CoCreation Table, with support from Grassroots Solutions, designed an information-gathering strategy that included listening sessions, one-on-ones, and surveys to learn about community members' thoughts, perceptions, and experiences about the census. Specifically, we focused on surfacing barriers, possible motivations for participation, and credible people who could influence participation. We spoke with a total of 200 people, from Owatonna to International Falls. This included: immigrant groups including, Latino, Somali, Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, Karen, Vietnamese, and West African African Americans Tribal members living on tribal lands, Urban Native people, emergency shelter residents, White low-wealth rural residents, and racial justice community organizers.

At the beginning of the project, one working assumption that was being made was that there would be discreet, specific messages that would be effective with each undercounted community. (Message A should be delivered to Community A, Message B to Community B, and so on.)

What we found was that, while undercounted communities do have unique features and considerations, there were overarching themes that were consistent across demographics. These themes provide the foundational messages for outreach to undercounted communities and a customized "story" can be built around these themes in a way that makes it relevant for different audiences. **Rather than distinct messages, it became clear that what mattered most was a combination of message as well as message context-- the messenger and relationship -- in which message is delivered.**

With the following overarching themes as anchoring points, and paying particular attention to messenger, customization of the message to specific communities will be co-developed within and with each community. When relevant, we've provided customized message samples under each theme as recommended by the Co-creation Table members and gathered during listening sessions.

Theme 1: We Don't Know: Most participants did not know what the Decennial Census was, why it is done, when it is done, how the data is used, and what impact it has on the well-being of the community.

Community	Message
	The Census impacts MY life and MY community. The Census count determines federal funding allocations for services that my family relies upon to help us meet our basic needs. There are many low wealth families in my community.
	Census numbers helps clinics figure out where to build new clinics.
	Census determines congressional districts
	The Census is about you; Every ten years the government counts your community to decide how much money to give your community for services and resources. Funding goes to school, transportation and community programs
	It's been 40 years that the Hmong community has been in Minnesota. It's time to be counted and help shape it. We are established here.
	It's been 25 years since the Somali community has been in Minnesota. It is now home. It's time to be counted and have a say in its and our future.

Theme 2: We are fearful: People expressed apprehension and fear about Census, both in terms of the process (strangers knocking at the door) and the potential for data to be used for harm (including concerns about disclosures to landlords, ICE, or employers).

Community	Sample Message
	You have a right to ask Census workers to prove their identity. By law, information they collect cannot be shared with ANYONE including landlords, social workers, law enforcement, or employers.
	It is currently illegal for anyone but Census employees to see individual data.
	If you watch for the Census in the mail and fill it out and return it when you receive it, then you do not need to answer the door to a stranger.
	Census data now is the most secure that any data can be. You can't find any information that would identify you as an individual, including your individual home address or citizenship status. Private information is never published. Census workers are not allowed to share your information under the penalty of a \$250,000 fine and up to five years in prison.
	If you fear harm, or your fears come true, you can call: (insert safety hotline number)

Theme 3: We are powerful and courageous: Members of undercounted communities were excited and energized when they understood what was at stake in the Census. Overwhelmingly, they said they wanted the Census to be done in service of advancing the best interests of their community instead of Census being done *to* them. Their passion and commitment to their communities and their own leadership outweighed the fear of harm, and they were eager to make the Census a tool for their own advancement.

	Sample Message
	<p>Our Asian American communities are part of the fabric of Minnesota; we count! We are here and we need fair distribution of resources to our community, for our children, for our future. Census data is critical to our children's future and the next generation. It helps us get the health care, transportation, schools, affordable housing, and higher education that our children need to get a good start and be successful.</p>

Theme 4: It's not your business: Many participants expressed resistance to what they perceived as a violation of privacy and an overreach of government into their personal lives. Many felt that this was information the government had already collected in a variety of ways and did not understand how Census data was different than information gathered during an immigration process or other government-driven endeavor.

Community	Sample Message
	<p>The Census proves our existence. If you are not counted, you are invisible. Invisibility means fewer resources are distributed in your area. Your participation in the Census helps your neighbors and community as well.</p>
	<p>It's everybody's business—your community needs everyone counted to get fully resourced.</p>
	<p>Our communities have been screened and examined thoroughly before entering the country as refugees or as immigrants. Many of us have made a home here and our communities continue to grow. In order to get an adequate amount of resources into the neighborhoods we live in, we must have an accurate count of our fast-growing communities.</p>

Theme 5: We've been historically traumatized: Many undercounted communities have experienced trauma, exploitation, and abuse at the hands of the government (both in the US and elsewhere) and have had their trust in government repeatedly broken. This historical trauma does not lend itself to openly embracing promises of privacy, protection, and positive outcomes for these communities.

	Sample Message
	I hear you; our government has misused information in the past. BUT it is currently illegal for anyone's individual information to be shared.
	Census/being counted is one of the ways that we can hold the government accountable for erasing us by showing them that we exist and getting the resources we deserve.

Theme 6: We've been erased: Undercounted communities describe their experience of feeling erased and invisible to the majority culture. Some examples include:

- Inaccurate identity options on the forms they (Native vs. American Indian for example)
- Blood quantum rules
- Basing census collection on physical addresses (which not everyone has)
- Having information withheld about systems like census that have such an impact on everyday life
- Ignoring repeated injustice, both historical and current

Community

Community	Sample Message
	The Census is about everyone; it is a chance for you to take a stand and the way to make it better is to be involved.

Theme 7: We crave stories: Undercounted community members crave real examples of how an undercount impacts their community and have a desire to have the impact of Census visible and real. It is important to note that Tribes have unique needs in terms of understanding how money flows to sovereign nations—not just through state governments allocations, but also through treaty agreements made directly with the federal government.

Community	Sample Message
	<p>North Minneapolis (55411 + 55412) "lost" 7,123 people between 2000 and 2010 which translates into \$109,124,360 in Federal funds lost to the State of Minnesota, Hennepin Co., and Minneapolis. There are several zip codes like that all over Minnesota. Given the characteristics of the zip codes, it is likely to be the result of an undercount versus an actual loss in population.</p>
	<p>According to the Census, there are 34,000 Somalis in the state, but many in the community estimate that number is closer to 100,000. If that is correct, the undercount means \$1,011,120,000 lost over the last decade to the State of Minnesota and the cities and counties in which people reside.</p>

Theme 8: We need to know the mechanics: Communities want full information about how Census works.

Question	Answer
When does it start and end?	It starts April, 2020 and ends in July, 2020.
What happens first?	Most people will get receive a postcard directing to an online form response, some people will get the printed form if they live in an area where internet connectivity is low.
What happens next?	If you don't respond to the postcard, you will get a letter followed by the form. If you don't respond to the form, you will get a letter (or two) from the Census followed by up to 6 visits per address from the enumerator. After 3 attempts, an enumerator can ask a proxy (like a neighbor or postman) for information about a person living at a particular address.
What does it look like?	This is being created now. It was a bulky piece of mail in 2010 (odd-sized letter) as it includes an envelope to return your completed form. (Include picture of form when available)
Is it in the mail? What color?	The form is sent via USPS. The color and format is being created.
If its online, how will I know it's there and where online is it?	The form will be available on a url which is not known at this time but you will receive post card providing it.
What if I don't have a residence and sleep on the bus or camped outside?	There are census canvassers who are talking to people experiencing homelessness on Census Day. Those staying in a shelter are covered under an operation known as Group Quarters.
Can I put the address of the community center near me?	No, people experiencing homelessness are supposed to be listed at the physical address where they are i.e. "under Lake Street bridge". This will be done by the enumerators on the night of April 1, 2020.
Can someone from the community organization/family member I trust help me fill it out?	Absolutely! With the new internet option, you do not have to work for the Census Bureau to help someone fill out their form.!

Theme 9: We need to see and hear from people like us: Not surprisingly, community members want to hear about Census from their own people. They need outreach to be conducted by people with their background, from their community, whom they trust. They want to engage with people who care about them, understand them, know how to reach them, know what they need to hear, and are connected to organizations that they trust.

Theme 10: Let us help: As people gained deeper understanding of how census data was used and how it directly affected their lives, they were eager to help. They know their community best and were ready to get trained and mobilized right away. They cautioned against assuming that being a census worker was the only way for people to help to get a complete count--in fact, many pointed out that if they get a short-term census job, that income means they lose basic benefits and/or that money goes to the emergency shelter if that's where they were living. They urged creative ways to offer compensation for their time and connections (such as gift cards).

Theme 11: We can use being counted as a tool for liberation: Making the census their own would enable historically undercounted communities to be SEEN and acknowledged as part of the fabric of Minnesota and the United States. They saw census to build longer lasting power and garner resources for the long term betterment of their communities.

Community	Sample Message
	I (we) live here too. (low wealth people) Many of us are employed in food service, hospitality, and care giving. Our children attend local schools. We pay taxes and shop in local businesses. I contribute to my community. I WANT to be counted.
	Filling out the Census can help you move forward by helping your community have resources for better schools, job assistance and improved public services.
	Our communities are here, and we're embedded. Our children are embedded. We want fair distribution of resources to our community; it is key to equality, and will help our communities, families, and future generations grow.
	One of the many reasons why our communities came to the United States is to ensure future for our culture and heritage. By making sure that our families, friends, and communities are counted through the Census 2020 we can ensure records of the continuation of our bloodlines, our culture and our identity.