Supporting the Census & ACS: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building - How State and Local Voices Can Make a Difference

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Supporting the Census & ACS: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building - How State and Local Voices Can Make a Difference
March 2, 2016

Logistics:
• Listen only mode
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SUPPORTING THE CENSUS & AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY:
A Toolkit for Coalition-Building

APDU/Census Project WEBINAR
March 2, 2016

Host
Brendan Buff, Association of Public Data Users

Introduction
Warren Brown, President, Association of Public Data Users

Presenters
• Phil Sparks, Co-Director, The Census Project
• Joan Naymark, Executive Director, MACS – Minnesotans for the American Community Survey
APDU Advocacy and Census Project team up to support census data

Advocacy

APDU's advocacy efforts cover a broad range of data issues and enable its members, from the casual user to the power user, to provide input to decision makers on important public data issues. APDU's advocacy efforts include:

Conducting Public Data Advocacy Efforts
Representatives from APDU regularly meet with members, partners, and policymakers and staff to discuss issues that affect public data. You can be a powerful advocate on statistical issues in Congress. See Communicating with Congress: How to Deliver the Message for more information.

http://apdu.org/advocacy/
Welcome to The Census Project website. The Census Project is a broad-based network of national, state, and local organizations that supports a fair and accurate 2020 Census and comprehensive American Community Survey (ACS) – the modern version of the census “long form”. Our participating stakeholders represent a diverse range of American sectors that rely on objective data for decision-making and promote civic engagement: business and industry; civil rights advocates; state and local governments; social service agencies; researchers and scientific associations; planners; foundations; and nonprofits focused on housing, child and family welfare, education, transportation, and other vital services.

http://thecensusproject.org/
You rely on census data if you are:

- A civic or elected official who makes policy decisions or allocates resources based on accurate, consistent census data.

- A research, data, or GIS analyst who works in the public, private, or nonprofit sector?

- A small business owner or corporate executive.

- An economic development agency, or a Chamber of Commerce, working to attract jobs and talent to your community.

- Someone who plans education, health, or housing outcomes by understanding trends in the community.

- A city leader who needs to understand neighborhood change, or a county administrator in a rural area working to balance resources and the needs of the community.

- A leader of a non-profit organization, working to provide essential services for health care, education, job training, veterans, or housing.
Census data are at risk in Congress ---

- Inadequate funding or funding that arrives too late for a cost-effective high quality 2020 Census

- American Community Survey sample size reduction and the real possibility of a “voluntary” survey
Some lawmakers have concerns about the census and ACS, fueled in part by calls from a handful of constituents:

- Confidentiality of data
- Privacy of personal Information

Lawmakers are also concerned about the cost of the census, mandating that the 2020 Census cost no more than the 2010 Census.
Myth: “If we’re not in DC, we can’t make a difference.”

**FACT:** It takes only a handful of calls or letters to elevate a topic to an issue for a member of Congress. That is achievable in every district and every state in the country and is amplified and strengthened through your local organization.
A free publication is now available on The Census Project website to help build a local stakeholder coalition to support census data.

Engaging local voices is easy.

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Building an Effective Local Coalition

ORGANIZE

• Get up-to-speed and stay informed  [http://www.thecensusproject.org/](http://www.thecensusproject.org/)
• Choose an individual or organization to lead and coordinate the coalition
• Create a steering committee, board of directors, or advisory board
• Choose a name for your coalition
• Create a mission statement
• Determine your legal status and potential sources of funding, if appropriate

Your mission statement:

• Keep it short and simple
• Make it relevant to stakeholders and lawmakers
• Describe why accurate, timely census and ACS data are important to your state and communities
Building an Effective Local Coalition

OUTREACH

• Start to build the coalition
  • Geography
  • Business and economic development
  • Local units of government
  • NGOs – Nonprofits, foundations, and the faith community
  • Civil rights organizations
  • Newsmakers

• Make the “ask” for organizations and individuals to become census data supporters
The MACS Model
Minnesotans for the American Community Survey

- Founded in 2013 in response to challenges to the ACS in Congress
  - Grew from 12 to 100 members between March & year-end 2013
  - 170+ organizational and individual supporters now

- Relationships developed with all 10 MN congressional offices
  - Staff & members in both D.C. and district offices
  - Lawmakers active in 2014, 2015, & 2016 to preserve and fund census data in both the House and Senate. 7 of 10 are active supporters!

- MACS Mission: To educate Minnesota’s congressional delegation and the public about the importance of consistent, reliable ACS census data for a healthy economy and to improve the well-being of all Minnesotans.

Constituent voices matter

http://minnesotansforacs.org/  https://www.facebook.com/MinnesotansForTheAmericanCommunitySurvey/
Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work

- Set priorities
  - Make policy statements
  - Encourage action by stakeholders
  - Encourage action by lawmakers
- Work with national partners
- Create information materials
- Good communication is essential
  - Leverage technology – website, social media, contacts
  - Internal communications keep everyone informed & engaged
  - External communications tell your story
Managing a Coalition; Advancing the Work

- Continue to engage local supporters and partners
  - Make it easy to act
  - Leverage supporters’ congressional contacts
  - Anticipate frequently asked questions

- Leverage the steering committee/board’s network and expertise

- Engage the media – the press is a big consumer of census and ACS data

Knowing when to act

Census stakeholders should be ready to communicate with their lawmakers at key moments in the legislative and appropriations process by following the lead of national census partners (see The Census Project website: Stakeholder Tools). There is a pattern to the federal legislative cycle during which key votes are made regarding Census Bureau programs. For a census data stakeholder coalition, action is concentrated in the Spring and Fall.

- **February**: President submits annual budget request for federal agencies and programs to Congress.
- **February – May**: House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees hold hearings to review budget requests for departments and agencies.
- **April – June**: Appropriations subcommittees (and subsequently, full committees) draft and vote on 12 annual funding bills (called a ‘mark-up’) covering federal government activities. The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies are responsible for Census Bureau funding.
- **June – September**: The House and Senate debate and vote on the annual appropriations bills. The federal fiscal year starts on October 1st.

In recent years (2012-2015), Congress has not completed appropriations bills on time or through normal legislative procedures, resorting instead to passing Continuing Resolutions to sustain funding at last year’s levels to roll all 12 separate appropriations bills into one omnibus appropriations bill. In addition, authority to act is sometimes withdrawn, which can occur at any time. For example, Government Reform hold a hearing in March to discuss response voluntary.

Stakeholders should also reach out to congressional offices when Congress is not in session at a more informal “coffee”, meeting, or event in the district. It is important to establish a working relationship with staff so the lawmaker will be ready to support census data and the ACS at key moments.
Your Primary Goal: Educating Members of Congress

- Identify lawmakers’ interests that are illuminated by census data
- Get to know congressional staff
- Arrange meetings with staff in the District and also Washington offices, if convenient
- Keep staff members informed about legislative activities that affect the census and ACS.
What do lawmakers hear about the ACS and census?

The primary mission of the Respondent Advocate is to advocate for respondents in all matters related to Census surveys and censuses.

“Is this survey legit? Is it a scam?”

“The primary mission of the Respondent Advocate is to advocate for respondents in all matters related to Census surveys and censuses.”
Alternative Models for Supporting Census Data

- Sector-Based Coalition
  - Partners and colleagues in your existing network, industry, or sector

- Targeting Congressional Committees
  - Appropriations Committees
  - Authorizing/Oversight Committees

- Rapid Response Strategy
  - Hybrid coalition across states, sectors, and interests.

“Big 7” - state and local government

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Bring actions to the state and local level
Conclusion

Constituents rarely mention support for census data to members of Congress. Yet, census data are used widely across all sectors of every lawmaker’s district and state.

Congress holds the power to:
• provide adequate and timely funds for the 2020 Census and ACS.
• maintain the ACS as a mandatory survey.

Constituents matter to members of Congress – your voice has impact.

Imagine…. if 5-10 census stakeholders in every congressional district informed their member of Congress and both senators that census data and the ACS are critically important to their local economy and the well-being of all, census data would have much stronger support in Congress.
Get started. It's easy!

Local voices can change this outcome.

Download your free copy of

“Supporting the Census & American Community Survey: A Toolkit for Coalition-Building”

at http://www.thecensusproject.org/

Questions? Comments?
Thank you for attending today’s APDU/Census Project Webinar

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