

# **BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE 2020 CENSUS**

compiled by the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area from U.S. Census Bureau materials

## **Check out *Census 101: What You Need to Know***

*A very simple 1-page handout from the US Census Bureau is attached.*

*Additional details follow.*

### **What the Census is:**

- A count of the entire U.S. population required by the Constitution, conducted every 10 years.
- If you live in the United States, you are required by law to complete the 2020 Census.
- The census counts people where they live. Dating back to the first census, in 1790, every census has been based on the concept of “usual residence,” which is the place where a person lives and sleeps most of the time. Census rules address special situations such as college students, hospital patients, people in shelters, people with more than one home, etc.

### **How the Census Bureau will ask us to respond:**

- 95% of households will receive their census invitation in the mail, asking us to go online to complete the census questionnaire, or to respond by phone.
- Areas less likely to respond online will receive a paper census questionnaire along with their invitation

### **The census questionnaire:**

- There are 10 questions, and the Census Bureau expects it will take most people 10 minutes to answer them.
- Some may remember the census “long form” from prior decades, which some households received. It was replaced in 2010 by the American Community Survey, which is conducted during the interim. Even if you are asked to fill out an American Community Survey this year, you must still fill out the basic census questionnaire.

### **How people may respond to the 2020 Census invitation:**

- Every household will have the option of responding online, by mail, or by phone. It is the first census where we may respond online.
- Check to see if your library will have computers and staff to assist people in responding and include that information in your message.
- No matter how you receive your initial invitation, the Census Bureau will follow up in person with all households that don't respond.

## Census timeline:

- Invitations will be sent in the mail between March 12-20.
- A reminder letter will be sent March 16-24.
- If you don't respond, you'll get a reminder post card March 26-April 3.
- A reminder letter and paper questionnaire will be sent April 8-16.
- A final reminder postcard will be sent April 20-27.
- If you still have not responded, a census worker will follow up in person in mid-May
- The Census Bureau expects to release the results by December 31, 2020 but must do so by January 25, 2021 so that redistricting may begin.

## Why the Census is important--and important to Texas:

- It's so important that it is in the U.S. Constitution. The first census was in 1790, and the census has been conducted every 10 years since.
- Census data tell us how many people live in the U.S., in Texas, in our cities and counties.
- *It determines whether Texas gets its fair share of members of the US House of Representatives and its fair share of more than \$675 billion dollars in federal funding for programs at all levels of government.*
- The census is conducted to reapportion the seats in the U.S. House of Representative based on our share of the US population. Our population has grown in the last decade, and *Texas is expected to pick up three additional seats in the House of Representatives, growing from 36 to 39—if we have a complete count.*
- Census data are used for much more than apportionment. For example, city and county governments use data for public safety and emergency management. School districts must know the number of residents and their ages to calculate the need for new schools. Businesses use data to determine where to locate and whether to expand.
- *Need a startling statistic to explain how important a complete count is? Did you know census data guide distribution of federal funds for highway construction, Medicare, school lunch programs, health programs, special education and more--an estimated \$1578 per capita in FY 2015. (Counting for Dollars 2020, George Washington University). For every 1% undercount, Educate Texas estimates Texas could lose \$300 million in federal revenue. An area's fair share of federal funds clearly depends on the accuracy of its census count.*

## Census workers in neighborhoods:

- Census takers will visit homes in April to conduct quality check interviews.
- Census takers will visit homes in mid-May to collect responses not yet received.
- Census workers will have a valid ID badge with photo, a US Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date. They may be carrying Census Bureau bags and other equipment with a Census Bureau logo. But they will not be wearing a uniform.

- Census workers also may be in neighborhoods this spring and summer, and at other times, collecting responses to the American Community Survey.
- In 2019, census workers called “address canvassers” were in neighborhoods looking for places where people live: houses, apartments, shelters, etc. The first step in the census process is to find the places to send the census invitations.

### **Confidentiality and security of responses:**

- It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish census information that identifies an individual or business. Workers take a lifelong pledge to handle data responsibly and keep information private. Penalties include fines and imprisonment.
- Law enforcement and other agencies may not access or use personal information from the census at any time.

**A resource for everyone: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)**