



GEARING UP FOR THE 2020 U.S. CENSUS

About the Census:

The U.S. Constitution mandates a Decennial Census to count every person residing in the country.[1] The census is designed and executed by the U.S. Census Bureau, an agency within the Department of Commerce.[2] Census data is used to distribute federal funding, draw legislative districts at all levels of government, forecast future transportation needs, and influence future development.[3]

Community Investment:

Census data is used by governments, businesses, and the nonprofit community to guide investment decisions. During fiscal year 2015, 132 programs used Census Bureau data to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds.[3] These programs included Highway and Planning Construction, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps), the National School Lunch Program, Section 8 Housing Choice, Head Start, and the Community Development Block Grant (including Hurricane Sandy Disaster Recovery Grants). Additionally, the nonprofit community uses census data to illustrate need in competitive applications for public and private grant funding.

Businesses use census data to locate potential sites, find people to advertise to, and identify potential markets for expansion.[4] As a result, market research driven by census data plays a pivotal role in determining if a business will choose a particular location and if a business model will be successful in a community.

Challenges

It is essential that a complete and accurate census count is performed in Nassau County to ensure competitiveness in public funding and private investment. If a Nassau County resident is not counted, the County will still be responsible for providing services but will not receive due resources. Furthermore, it may negatively impact a business decision to start or expand in Nassau County.

The three challenges below may present an obstacle to obtaining a full and accurate count.

- 1. Funding Levels:** The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has determined that the 2020 Decennial Census is a high-risk initiative and that cost estimates by the Bureau are not reliable.[5] The 2010 U.S. Census was the most expensive in history (\$12.3 billion), and the GAO is urging Congress to increase funding levels.
- 2. Technological Advancement:** The Census Bureau is projecting that the 2020 Census will be the first to be completed largely online and aims to invite 80% of households to submit their responses on the internet.[6] While employing technology can save the Bureau money, it presents an obstacle to those who may not feel comfortable using the internet (seniors) and those without reliable access to broadband (low-income residents). As Nassau County has a rapidly aging population, this presents a unique challenge.
- 3. Citizenship Question:** There is currently a legal battle occurring on whether a question that asks for citizenship status can be included in a Decennial Census.[1] Many immigrant advocates have argued that immigrant households may choose not to participate in the census out of fear that the data may be used against them. As Nassau County does have a large and growing immigrant population, this is a challenge to ensuring an accurate count.

In the coming year, policymakers, community organizations, and residents will have to work together to make sure that every resident is counted and Nassau is competitive for future investment.



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