NEW VENTURE FUND’S 2020 CENSUS PROJECT
Census Equity Fund Emergency Grants
AN INITIATIVE OF THE DEMOCRACY FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE CENSUS SUBGROUP

The Census Equity Fund supports state and regional efforts to prepare for and conduct outreach to encourage full participation in the 2020 census, with a focus on historically undercounted populations.\(^1\) Through grantmaking in 2019 and early 2020, the Fund has provided grants to 62 coalitions or organizations in 26 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, DC to conduct census education and outreach targeting hard-to-count (HTC) populations.\(^2\)

The current coronavirus pandemic presents significant challenges to an accurate census. Many of the approaches planned to reach historically undercounted populations must be shifted. Door-to-door outreach, community gatherings, assistance spots at libraries and other community centers are among the approaches no longer possible in the current era of mandated social distancing. Groups already are shifting their outreach approaches to emphasize digital outreach, phone calling, texting, and radio and social media ads, among other approaches.

Even before the current health crises, the Fund planned to make available additional resources for Emergency Grants to a small number of organizations for additional outreach efforts in low self-response areas. In light of COVID-19, we’ve increased the expected number of organizations that will receive grants, broadened the focus of the grants, and added an additional round of grantmaking.

These will be modest-sized grants of $30,000 - $75,000 to groups for additional outreach activities and related organizational support in regions with very low self-response rates based on real-time data provided by the Census Bureau as of April 20, 2020 for the first round and as of May 13, 2020 for the second round. As both rounds of grantmaking will occur on an expedited timeline to get resources into the field quickly, these grants will be targeted to organizations that already received a Census Equity Fund grant in an earlier round.

The Census Subgroup’s Census Equity Fund Committee will consider self-response rates across states and regions as of April 20 (for round one) and as of May 13 (for round two) as well as regions’ demographic data with regard to historically undercounted populations, in determining organizations to invite to submit proposals. The Committee also will factor in the short- and long-term needs of organizations in making the transition to virtual communications and digital organizing for census and civic engagement. Approximately 20 groups across the two rounds will be invited to apply.

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\(^1\) The Census Bureau has noted eight “low-response characteristics,” factors associated with lower response rates. They are: (1) Non-White; (2) household with children under age 5; (3) renters; (4) annual household income less than $35,000; (5) female head of household, particularly not married or living with another adult; (6) less than a high school education; (7) large household of four or more people; and (8) multi-unit or mobile home structure.\(^2\) “Hard-to-count” is a common term used for those areas or populations that historically have been either hard to reach to fill out the census or end up being undercounted in the census. For our purposes, we have defined HTC as households that had a low self-response rate in the 2010 census. The data was compiled by the CUNY Mapping Service at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center from Census Bureau data.
Below is information about the grants timeline, funded activities and proposal guidelines. If you have any questions, please contact Amy Dominguez-Arms, Senior Advisor, New Venture Fund, at amydarms@gmail.com.

**Timeline**

April 10, 2020  
Updated Census Equity Fund Emergency Grants Overview released

April 23, 2020  
Census Equity Fund Committee reviews April 20 data, determines priority states/regions, and invites first-round proposals

April 30, 2020  
First-round proposals due

May 7, 2020  
First-round grant decisions announced

May 8 – Aug. 31, 2020  
First-round grant period

May 15, 2020  
Census Equity Fund Committee reviews May 13 data, determines priority states/regions, and invites first-round proposals

May 22, 2020  
Second-round proposals due

May 27, 2020  
Second-round grant decisions announced

May 28 – Aug. 31, 2020  
Second-round grant period

**Funded Activities**

All funded activities should be targeted to HTC populations. Examples of activities that could be funded include, but are not limited to:

- Digital strategies for reaching the hardest-to-count with messages to fill out the census;
- Phone banking and texting campaigns targeting the hardest-to-count with messages to fill out the census;
- Virtual townhalls and other approaches for reaching historically undercounted populations that do not involve in-person interactions;
- PSAs/ads encouraging census participation in locations that reach the hardest-to-count;
- Building organizational capacity to pivot to digital organizing strategies;
- Supporting the staff team executing these strategies in the midst of new stresses on their personal lives; and
- Re-granting to local groups to conduct the above activities.

Even if social distancing restrictions are lifted, grant funds cannot be used for door-to-door campaigns during this Non-Response Follow Up phase of the census. Moreover, we encourage organizations to be mindful of the dangers presented by the coronavirus disease, as described by the CDC.
Grant amounts will vary, depending on proposed activities and the coalition’s or organization’s capacity. We estimate that most Emergency Grants will be in the $30,000–$75,000 range.

**Preparing a Proposal**

We are inviting brief applications, so as not to burden organizations during a busy time. Please address the following in a proposal of about two pages, plus a budget as described below:

- Name of the organization submitting the proposal with contact information for key staff;
- Brief summary of principal census outreach strategies and activities to date;
- Proposed use of funds, including:
  - The major outreach strategies that will be utilized to encourage the participation/counting of the hardest-to-count in targeted regions;
  - How these activities relate to other census activities being undertaken by state or local governments, nonprofits, businesses, funders, or others;
  - Any allocation of funds to build organizational capacity to pivot to digital organizing strategies or other capacities needed in this new outreach environment; and
  - A description of key partners and allies.
- Project budget and amount requested from the Census Equity Fund.

**About the Democracy Funders Collaborative Census Subgroup**

In 2015, leaders from several foundations participating in the Democracy Funders Collaborative formed a Census Subgroup to develop and execute a plan to ensure a complete count as the U.S. Constitution requires. Today, the Census Subgroup members include:

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Bauman Foundation  
Carnegie Corporation  
Ford Foundation  
Joyce Foundation  
JPB Foundation  
Open Society Foundations  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
The James Irvine Foundation  
Unbound Philanthropy  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
Wallace H. Coulter Foundation  
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The following foundations also participate:

Heising-Simons Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
The California Endowment
About the New Venture Fund

New Venture Fund manages a pooled fund that supports projects aligned with the 2020 Census Project. New Venture Fund conducts public interest initiatives and provides professional insight and services to institutions and individuals seeking to foster change through strategic philanthropy. For questions about the Census Equity Fund Emergency Grants, please contact Amy Dominguez-Arms, Senior Advisor, New Venture Fund, at amydarms@gmail.com