

FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY:

# THE WE COUNT LA IMPACT STORY

**WE COUNT  
LOS ANGELES**  
Our Community. Our Census.

 **California  
COMMUNITY  
Foundation**



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The story of the 2020 Census  
in Los Angeles County is one of

# COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



Facing insurmountable barriers and the shifting tides of unprecedented challenges, organizers and leaders pushing Angelenos to participate in the decennial effort had no choice but to stand strong and navigate the most difficult census of our lifetime.

Participation in the census is critical to the well-being of future generations of Los Angeles County. Census data plays an integral role in influencing the allocation of millions of dollars in federal funding for vital services and programs for our communities — from schools and hospitals to housing and roads. The census also determines the number of congressional members sent to the Capitol to represent our region, making an accurate count in Los Angeles County profoundly important.

Efforts to ensure a complete and accurate count, particularly among traditionally hard-to-count communities have historically fallen short by the

U.S. Census Bureau in fulfilling its duties. With so much at stake, particularly for vulnerable communities, leaders in philanthropy and local advocacy groups have stepped up every decade to fill the gap.

In a landmark effort, California Community Foundation (CCF) convened a powerful coalition of 115+ community-based organizations (CBOs) across the region to count historically under-counted populations, coordinated and united under one region-wide campaign: [We Count LA](#). As trusted messengers with deep relationships and connections in their respective communities, these CBOs would be the faces and voices of the census, encouraging the diverse and vulnerable communities of Los Angeles County to participate in the 2020 Census. Amid the unforeseen global and national events of 2020, this task became seemingly impossible. Yet the unifying force of community resilience pushed the We Count LA campaign to become responsive, adaptive and innovative in trying to accomplish its goals.



**The purpose of this report is to** share the powerful story of the We Count LA 2020 Census campaign, **its impact, and to share lessons learned in the hopes of using this legacy to set an example for future civic and community engagement efforts in Los Angeles County and beyond.**

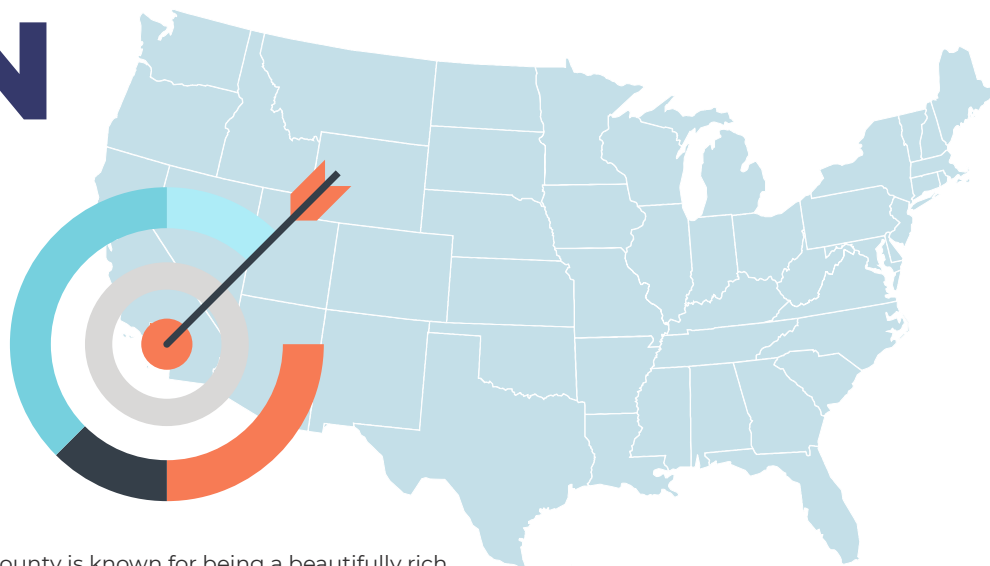
Los Angeles is the

# HARDEST-TO-COUNT REGION

in the United States

## "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THE HARDEST-TO-COUNT?"

What's behind this designation? Los Angeles County is known for being a beautifully rich and diverse region — yet its complexity contributes greatly to its own challenges and barriers for obtaining an accurate census count:



### OUR COUNTY

- 2nd largest school district in the country



- 4x the geographic size of Rhode Island
- Population of 10.4M, behind only the states of California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Georgia, and North Carolina

- Over 200 languages spoken



- 20% lacking broadband Internet subscriptions



### OUR PEOPLE

- 1 out of 3 residents is an immigrant



- 1 out of 4 residents have limited English proficiency



- 1 out of 5 residents lives below the poverty line



- Home to nearly 1 million undocumented immigrants



## GEOGRAPHIC SPRAWL & POPULATION SIZE

Los Angeles County is a sprawling region that spans over 4,000 square miles of land, nearly four times as large as Rhode Island.

Within this vast expanse is a population totaling more than 10.4 million people, a number that exceeds the population of over 42 U.S. states. Los Angeles County comprises 88 cities as well as 140 unincorporated areas and is home to the second largest school district in the country.

Counting such a large number of people across such an expansive geography poses a major challenge in itself.



## UNPARALLELED DIVERSITY

**As the second largest metropolitan area in the country, our home defines diversity.**

[Nearly half of Los Angeles County's population](#) is Latino, 15% identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) which itself has at least four distinct ethnic subgroups, and 8% identify as Black. Immigrants are an essential part of Los Angeles County, making up over one-third of our total population. Over 200 languages are spoken across the region, with [one in four](#) Los Angeles County residents identifying as having limited English

proficiency. Home to nearly [1 million undocumented immigrants](#), our region is a multifaceted tapestry woven together by communities representing every corner of the globe. **Such a vast array of diversity also increases the intricacy and challenge in reaching every community for an accurate census count.**

## SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES

Los Angeles County ranks [7th in income inequality](#) out of the nation's largest metro regions, with nearly one in every five Los Angeles residents (18.4%) living below the poverty line. The public health and housing crisis of homelessness has drastically [increased in the past few years](#) — every night,

more than 66,000 Angelenos sleep in shelters, their vehicles or on the streets. In addition, Latinos and African Americans are [disproportionately poor](#) and overrepresented in Los Angeles County's poverty rates. These intersecting socioeconomic disparities present great challenges in reaching low-income and homeless residents across Los Angeles County. Many of these same individuals are in unstable living conditions or are without Internet access.

**As of 2018, approximately [20% of households](#) did not have a broadband subscription, compounding the difficulty in counting these residents in the census.**

**4,000+**  
square miles  
of land

**10.4+** million  
people

**200+**  
languages  
spoken

**1 million**  
undocumented  
immigrants

**7th** in  
income  
inequality

**18.4%**  
living below the  
poverty line

**20%** of households  
without broadband subscription

## SETTING THE STAGE: HISTORIC CHALLENGES AND GAPS TO FILL OUT OF THE GATE

The historic challenge of the census every 10 years is conveying relevance and urgency. Unlike voting, census participation does not have an immediate, easily visible outcome in which people feel their lives have been directly impacted. Federal dollar allocation and congressional representation are the most important and tangible results of the census' influence, but explaining that correlation can be complex and requires clear, concise and relatable messages to draw these connections.

The 2020 Census, however, came with additional challenges. At the U.S. Census Bureau, both budget cuts as well as the roll-out of an online-focused

census meant that there would be a more limited ground game and fewer enumerators conducting outreach in the community. In addition, suppression tactics, including the consideration of including a citizenship question, laid the groundwork of alienation among those who were already fearful amid the ongoing political climate — immigrants, undocumented individuals, and people from racial and ethnic minority groups that were already considered the hardest-to-count.

**The magnitude of this effort required unprecedented collaboration and resources — even before activating our coalition to begin outreach.**

# WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

## DATA-FUELED STRATEGIES: ROBUST INVESTMENT IN PLANNING AND RESEARCH

With a commitment to advancing systemic change in the region, California Community Foundation (CCF) started with a deep research & discovery process to understand the

communities we needed to reach — and the landscape we would end up operating in.

We engaged multiple organizations at both the local and regional level to conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses:

- **Advancement Project California in partnership with Census Policy and Advocacy Network** provided a community-informed regional plan for outreach activities and tactics that could be supported by community-based organizations to inform our planning process.

■ **The University of California Los Angeles, Department of Political Science** conducted an analysis of demographic factors specific to Los Angeles County, such as population change or growth, racial/ethnic diversity, foreign-born, homeless, limited English proficiency, internet access, etc. for CCF to better understand the extent to which some populations fall within or outside of the boundaries of the Low Response Score (LRS) created by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Hard to Count (HTC) score created by the State of California.

**CCF spearheaded fundraising efforts to create a pooled fund from philan-**

**thropy and government partners to support the region's census outreach activities.** The Weingart Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, Ballmer Group, The California Endowment, Smidt Foundation, Mindy and Gene Stein, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, Roy & Patricia Disney Family Foundation, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, L.A. Care Health Plan, Libra Foundation, and the City of Los Angeles all stepped-up to support the community-based organizations for this massive, regional effort.

The State of California then named CCF as the region's **Administrative Community Based Organization (ACBO)**, designating for leading and coordinating education and outreach to hard-to-count communities across Los Angeles County.

**With support from these multi-sector partners, CCF had the resources it needed to bring We Count LA to life and advance the strategies to count Los Angeles' hardest-to-count communities.**

## AGAINST THIS LANDSCAPE, WE KNEW THAT AN ACCURATE CENSUS COUNT IN LA COUNTY WOULD BE NO EASY TASK.

WE WOULD NEED TO CONDUCT AN EXPANSIVE, DIRECT OUTREACH EFFORT, PAIRED WITH INNOVATIVE OUTREACH METHODS TO REACH HARD-TO-COUNT (HTC) COMMUNITIES.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**As the core grantmaker and administrative CBO for the region, CCF was intentional from the start about ensuring that We Count LA was a campaign built for the community, by the community.**

CCF offered grants to community organizations that reflected the widest diversity of HTC populations and could reach the tracts most in need of outreach. In selecting communications, organizing, outreach, and research and evaluation partners, CCF ensured their teams were as diverse as the communities they would serve in the campaign.

CCF did not employ a rigid centralized campaign structure, recognizing that each of LA County's regions would need the freedom to adapt the campaign to their unique needs. **A non-traditional grantmaking model that enabled seamless coordination and diverse representation at the campaign level with autonomy at the regional community levels was in order.**



## CENTRALLY DRIVEN, REGIONALLY COORDINATED AND LOCALLY EXECUTED: THE WE COUNT LA INFRASTRUCTURE

With these principles in mind, CCF engaged a wide range of organizations for the We Count LA effort and built a three-tier infrastructure of organizations to carry out the campaign:

1.

**At the heart of the We Count LA infrastructure was the community.** A coalition of **115+ strong community-based organizations** would engage directly with HTC audiences in the places where they live, play, work and worship.

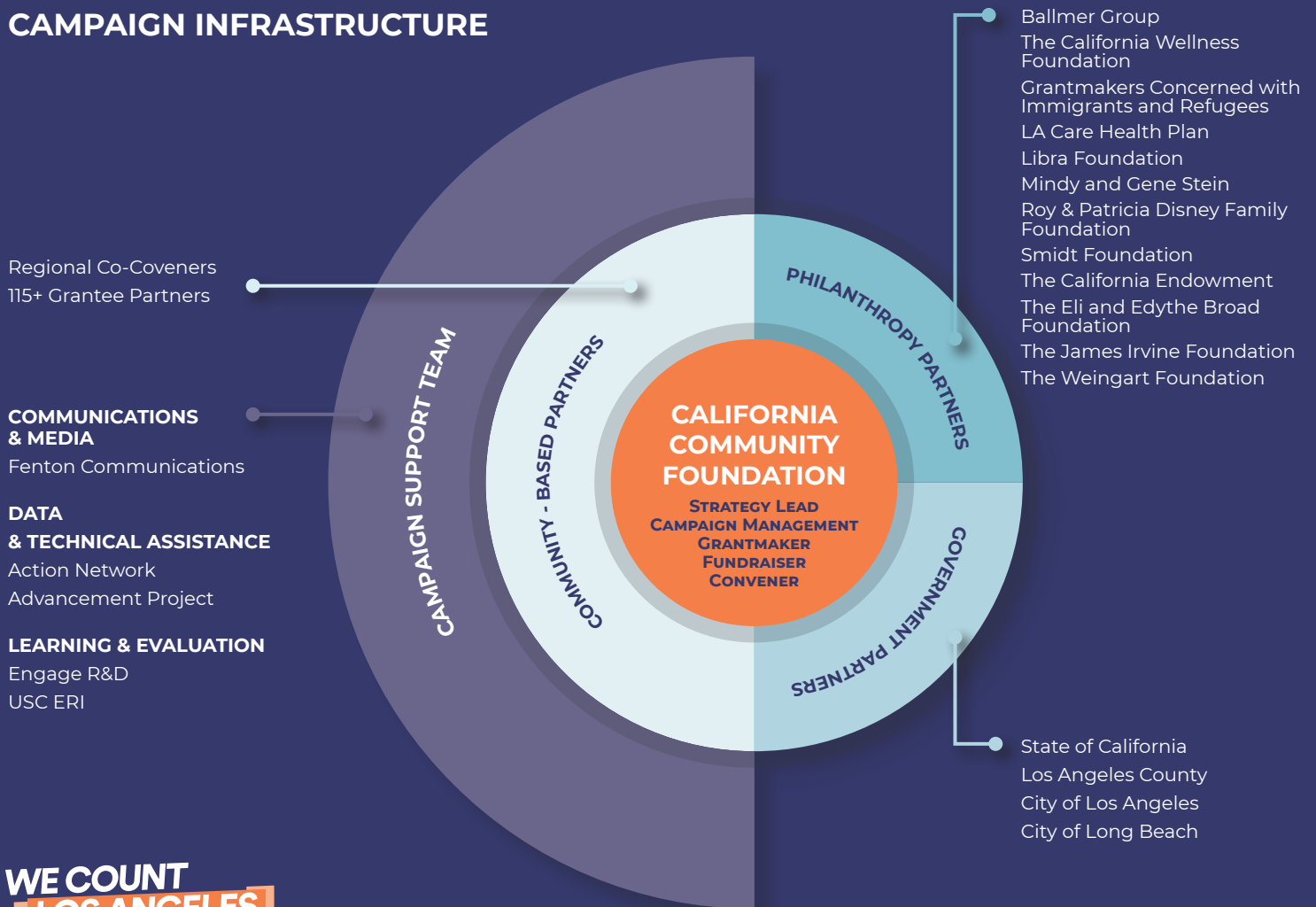
2.

**Regional outreach and data coordination would streamline and respond to trends from local efforts.** Regional census tables composed of one representative from each region would meet regularly to manage community partners across their region while ensuring that data was fed into centralized campaign systems.

3.

**A centralized campaign team would ensure surround-sound communications across LA County.** Communications efforts would be powered by data and outcomes from local canvassing efforts, and in turn, highly-coordinated earned and hyper-local paid media, digital engagement, capacity building for community-based groups, activation of state-of-the-art community organizing tools and the development of tailored communications materials and tools would support and feed back into on-the-ground community outreach.

### CAMPAIGN INFRASTRUCTURE



## CAMPAIGN TEAM

- **CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION** — ACBO & We Count LA campaign lead
- **FENTON COMMUNICATIONS** — Surround-sound Get Out The Count (GOTC) communications strategy and content, and intra-coalition communications implementation
- **ACTION NETWORK** — Grassroots organizing infrastructure and platform
- **DSPOLITICAL** — Paid digital media targeting and content delivery
- **GPGENERATE** — Paid media partnerships and placements
- **USC EQUITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE** — Evaluation and research
- **ENGAGE R&D** — Evaluation and research
- **THRUTEXT** — Peer-to-peer texting

## CO-CONVENERS

- **Advancement Project CA** — County-wide support with a focus on Central LA, South LA, East LA and Northeast LA
- **Antelope Valley Partners in Health** — Antelope Valley and Santa Clarita
- **Pacoima Beautiful** — San Fernando Valley
- **LA Voice** — San Gabriel Valley
- **Long Beach Forward** — Long Beach
- **Southeast LA Collaborative** — Southeast LA
- **Community Coalition** — South LA and South Bay
- **Pomona Economic Opportunity Center** — Pomona Valley

**As a coalition of 115+ partners,  
we had one shared goal in mind:**

# TO ENCOURAGE HTC POPULATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

## CAMPAIGN ECOSYSTEM AND STRATEGIES

The three-tier infrastructure put in place was crucial to achieving this goal. Each level had their own objectives, which were designed to complement each other and feed into a continuous cycle that would respond to the needs of our GOTC effort in real-time.

**1. Community partners would drive the campaign and carry out the ground game, reaching communities through a variety of channels:**

### A. DIRECT OUTREACH

- I. Door-to-Door Canvassing
- II. Phone Banking
- III. Coalition Building

### B. TRAINING

- I. Technical Assistance
- II. Train-the-Trainer Services

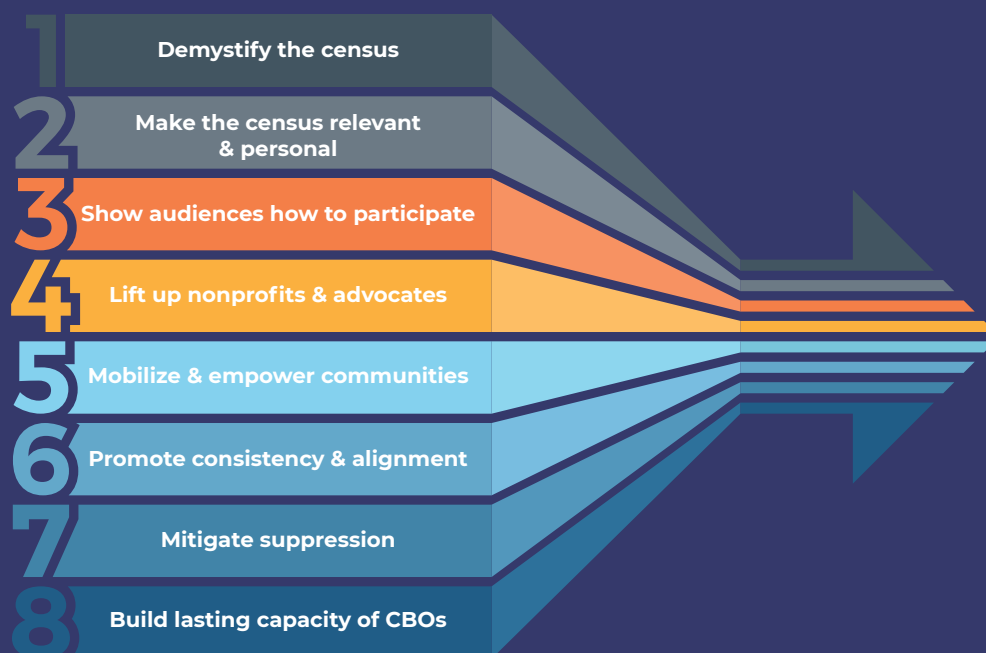
### C. ASSISTANCE CENTERS

### D. COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**2. The core campaign team would complement on-the-ground efforts with a surround-sound virtual campaign, comprising paid and earned communications as well as digital media outreach.**

**3. Regional evaluators would review data and inform shifts needed in the air or ground game in real-time.**

## CAMPAIGN ECOSYSTEM &amp; STRATEGIES

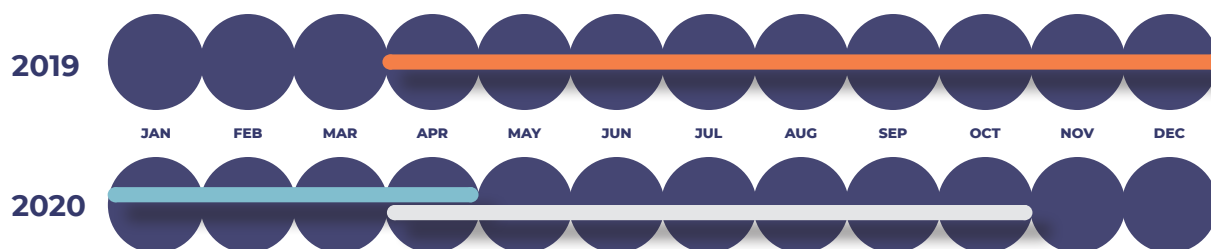


ENCOURAGE  
HTC POPULATIONS  
TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE CENSUS

## CAMPAIGN PHASES:

## EDUCATION, ACTIVATION, AND FOLLOW-UP

Our work had been organized into three phases:



### PHASE I: EDUCATION (April 2019 - December 2019)

CCF and campaign partners **built the infrastructure** that would power the campaign through the three phases, and led the coalition of community partners through a series of **capacity-building trainings** to prepare ourselves for an expansive rollout of outreach tactics during the activation phase.

### PHASE II: ACTIVATION (January 2020 - April 2020)

We began **soft launching the communications and organizing elements** of the campaign in the lead-up to Census Day on April 1, 2020. Our activities swelled during this phase as the coalition **leveraged every outreach tactic possible** to educate, engage, and motivate HTC audiences across every corner of Los Angeles County to complete their census forms.

### PHASE III: FOLLOW-UP (April 2020 - October 2020)

Our campaign **planned to pivot** to reach audiences who had yet to complete the census form. Employing a two-pronged strategy, we would leverage the regional tables to get data on community outreach activities, pair them with survey responses from community partners to get their pulse on the field work, and review early reporting from the U.S. Census Bureau **to make real-time adjustments to our virtual outreach and messages and vice versa**. This would ultimately ensure we targeted neighborhoods and communities showing the lowest response rates.





# A GLOBAL PANDEMIC SWEEPS LOS ANGELES COUNTY

The onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic reshaped nearly every aspect of our daily lives — how we work, how we navigate public spaces and how we interact with others suddenly became risk factors in the community spread of a highly contagious virus. Furthermore, COVID-19 had a severe and disproportionate impact on the very communities we intended to reach. **Reports illustrate strong correlations between neighborhoods at-risk of a census undercount and the areas with the highest rates**

**of COVID-19 cases. These were the very communities that would have benefited most from in-person census outreach.**

But on March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom issued a statewide stay at home order, just days before Census Day, which was meant to be the biggest push for census outreach. As a highly populous region, LA County faced the strictest lockdown protocols in the state.

**This lockdown resulted in a complete stop of our planned canvassing efforts — prohibiting community partners from making the face-to-face connections and organizing events that we knew were crucial to getting vulnerable communities counted, and that had been the linchpin of the We Count LA strategy.**

In a matter of just a few days, census organizers and leaders were facing a new, unprecedented challenge of epic proportion.

## AGILITY IN ACTION

Before we made a strategic pivot, we had to understand how the pandemic had impacted our community partners, what they needed, and how they planned to respond to the crisis.

The campaign team hosted an initial virtual town hall to receive this feedback and solicit community partners' thoughts via a pulse survey. We learned that many partners wanted to fully switch to virtual outreach as soon as possible, but felt they lacked the capacity to carry them out effectively.

In response, We Count LA conducted additional virtual outreach capacity training workshops to help our partners feel confident and secure in their approach, and developed additional resources and launched new tools to help each organization customize their virtual outreach strategy.

Through these efforts, every partner was supported to leverage digital tactics like email marketing, peer-to-peer texting, phone banking, and even paid social media to reach their communities about the census.

As an aftermath of the pandemic, many CBO partners also expressed they faced internal staffing, capacity, and budgetary challenges in shifting to remote outreach tactics. Others shared they had to shift roles as “frontline” organizations serving as purveyors of basic needs and key resources to support the communities they serve.

**The We Count LA campaign team sprang into action, driving more dollars than we had originally intended into blanketing LA County's airwaves, TV programming, and even streaming services like YouTube, Pandora, and Spotify to deliver census messages targeted to HTC communities.**

A robust speakers' bureau was created to ensure voices and faces that were trusted messengers would be the ones to deliver messages about the census to LA County's hardest-to-count communities. Additional messaging and interviewing trainings took place to support these messengers to communicate persuasively about the census.

Finally, we worked with partners on the ground to pair essential and/or frontline services with census outreach, such as flyers distributed at meal services. CCF also partnered with the State of California and LA County to place ads in nearly 500 store locations throughout HTC communities.

**Amid an already difficult census, COVID-19 exponentially increased the barriers and challenges faced by the We Count LA campaign.**

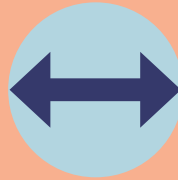
**Yet, the partnership within the coalition and CCF played a significant role in bringing a sense of unity — and the spark of innovative outreach tactics — during this urgent and critical time.**

## THE FINAL SELF-RESPONSE RATE (SRR)

LA County self-response rate in context.

**65.1%**

Final LA County SRR:

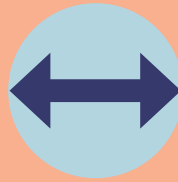


**63.1%**

Average SRR  
of all California counties:

**59.8%**

Final LA County  
HTC tract median SRR:



**59.2%**

Average SRR  
of all California counties:

**10M** Population **200+** different languages spoken **2.3M** people with limited English proficiency

Out of 58 counties in California...

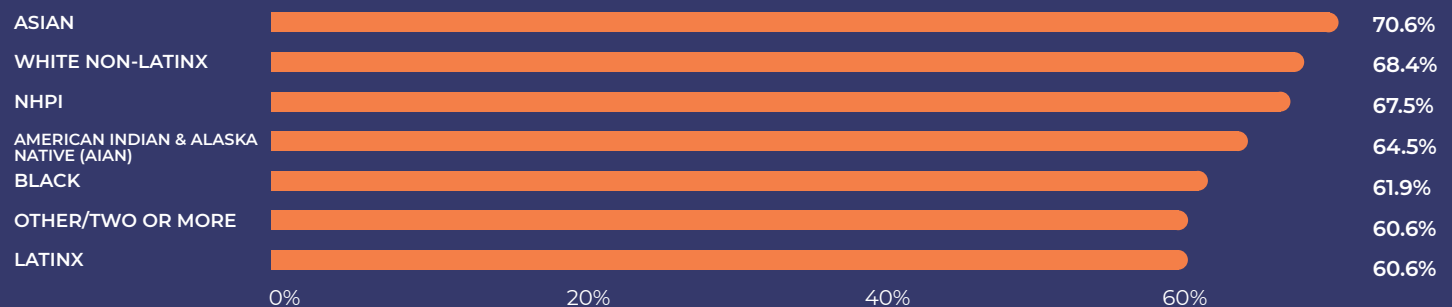
**6th** largest Black/African-American population **11th** largest Hispanic/Latino population **12th** largest Asian population

## WHO & WHERE: FINAL SELF-RESPONSE RATES

**Data Note:** We do not have data on who responded to the 2020 Census, we only know the number of households that responded in each tract. We identified the census tracts with a high share (highest quintile, or top 20%) of each demographic group. For example, in 20% of census tracts in LA County, the tract population is 11.2% Black or more. These tracts make up the top quintile of census tracts for the Black population. See tables below for quintile thresholds that define the 'top quintile' for all demographic groups.

### COMBINED SELF-RESPONSE RATE IN COUNTY CENSUS TRACTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

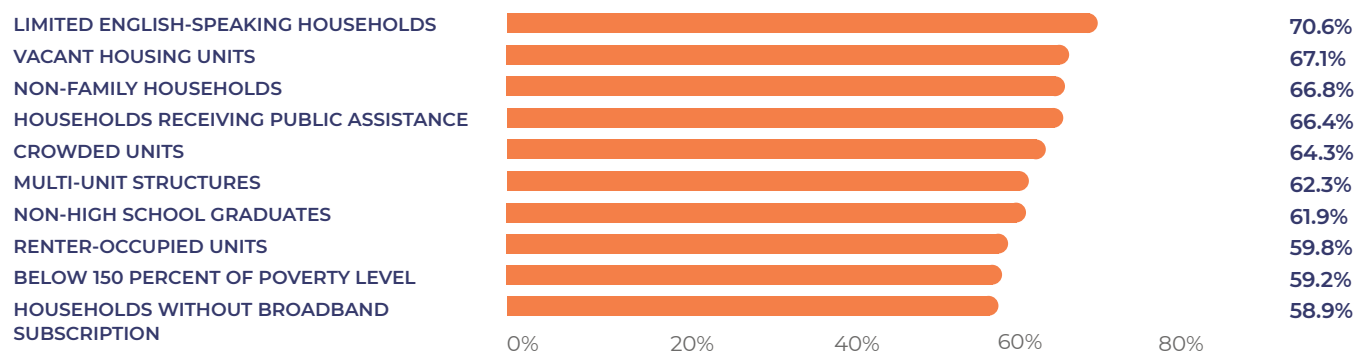
Self-response where tract share of race/ethnicity is in the top quintile for all tracts in LA County



- The top quintile of census tracts for the Latinx population have a combined self-response rate of 60.6%, as do the top quintile for the **Other/Two or More population**. This is the lowest combined self-response rate in the county.
- The top quintile of census tracts for the share of the **Asian population** have a combined response rate of 70.6%. This is the highest combined self-response rate in the county.

Estimated Self-Response rate

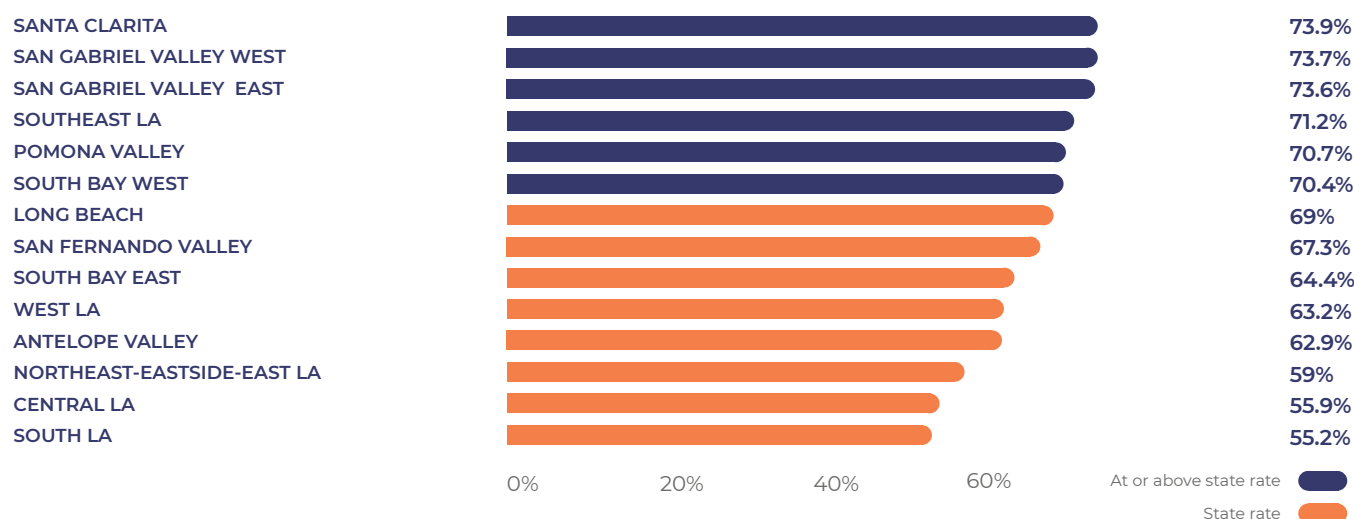
## COMBINED SELF-RESPONSE RATE\* IN COUNTY CENSUS TRACTS BY TOP HARD-TO-COUNT CHARACTERISTICS



- The census tracts where the top Hard-To-Count characteristics (defined by California Complete Count) are Households without broadband subscription and Below 150 percent of poverty level have the lowest combined self-response rate.
- The census tracts where the top Hard-To-Count characteristic is Limited English-speaking households have the highest combined self-response rate.

\*Estimated  
Self-Response rate

## ESTIMATED FINAL SELF-RESPONSE RATE OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY REGIONS



Data provided by Advancement Project CA.

## SUMMARY: REGIONS

Nearly half of the subregions (six out of fourteen) have an estimated self-response rate that is above the state rate (69.6%). The regions with self-response rates below the state rate tend to have a greater density of Hard-To-Count tracts. The exception is Southeast Los Angeles, which has both a high density of Hard-To-Count tracts and a relatively high self-response rate.

There were two regions that exceeded their 2010 self-response rate. Santa Clarita and Long Beach. Santa Clarita exceeded its 2010 rate by 1.2 percentage points, Long Beach by 0.4 percentage points. The remaining 12 subregions finished lower than their 2010 self-response rates. While six regions (San Gabriel Valley East & West, South Bay West, Pomona Valley, Southeast Los Angeles, and Antelope Valley) came within 3 percentage points of their 2010 rate, others were further away. Northeast/Eastside/East LA finished 12 percentage points under its 2010 rate, South Los Angeles 8.9 points under and Central Los Angeles finished

8.8 under. Except for West Los Angeles, all these regions had many Hard-To-Count census tracts and were hit hard by COVID-19.

Many Hard-To-Count communities in South, Central and Southeast LA had higher self-response rates than less Hard-To-Count communities in more affluent regions. For example, Malibu, the lowest-responding community in West LA, had a self-response rate of 41.8%, and Venice finished with a self-response rate of 49.2% – both lower than the very Hard-To-Count communities Watts in South LA (50.1%), Huntington Park in Southeast LA (60.4%), and Westlake in Central LA (52.2%).



# THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ILLUSTRATE THE SHEER COMPLEXITY OF REACHING ALL 10 MILLION ANGELENOS ACROSS LOS ANGELES COUNTY – AND SIGNIFY THE SCALE & SOPHISTICATION NEEDED TO REACH THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE

Ultimately, the efforts of the We Count LA campaign played a crucial role in helping Los Angeles County achieve a **65.1%** self-response rate.

This self-response rate is 2 percentage points above the average response rate of all California counties and our HTC tract self-response rate was 0.6 percentage points above the average HTC tract response rate of all California counties.

A 65.1% self-response rate in Los Angeles County for the 2020 Census is a particularly significant achievement for several reasons:

- Los Angeles County has nearly three times the population of the second largest county in comparison, San Diego County.

Los Angeles County is a sprawling region of 88 municipalities, 140 unincorporated areas, and more than 10 million people. In comparison, San Diego County has a population of 3.3 million and 18 incorporated cities.

- Over 1 in 5 people in Los Angeles County have limited English proficiency — the highest rate of all California counties. Los Angeles County's population speaks more than 200 different languages, and these 2.3 million Angelenos with limited English proficiency represent nearly four times more people compared to the next highest county, Orange County.



- Los Angeles County ranks 6th, 11th, and 12th out of all 58 California counties in Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian populations respectively. These communities have been historically underserved, under-recognized, and undercounted in previous census efforts, and were then hit the hardest by the economic and health impacts of the pandemic. Furthermore, reports back from the field showed us that many of these communities with large immigrant populations were highly reluctant to participate in the census as a result of suppression efforts. These communities would have benefited the most from the trusted face-to-face outreach that had to stop due to the pandemic.

## WE COUNT LA CAMPAIGN IMPACT

As a result of careful planning and investment in such a robust and collaborative structure, CCF was able to deliver on the goals as LA County's administrative CBO for the census:

### COORDINATION SUCCESSES:



**Built the regional infrastructure to launch and sustain GOTC activities**



**Supported the creation of community driven regional coordination tables to direct outreach efforts and foster county-wide coalition building;**



**Raised awareness of census activities through education efforts;**



**Created an integrated communications campaign;**



**Conducted a robust regional evaluation of the campaign; and**



**Built communications capacity far deeper and more expansive than planned.**

**With a structure that supported us from the very beginning through the end, the We Count LA campaign stood strong in the face of the challenges we experienced from the onset — and the ones we met along the way.**

#### ■ **Thirteen capacity-building trainings laid the groundwork:**

Over 700 staff members from across the We Count LA coalition attended We Count LA's trainings that equipped them with the tools and information they needed to carry out their virtual outreach and canvassing. For CBOs that needed additional support or capacity, the campaign team was available for dozens of one-on-one training sessions and office hours.

#### ■ **Frequent, robust coalition communications kept all 115+ partners connected:**

Weekly digests were sent to over 200 partner email addresses to collect partner feedback on an ongoing basis and keep them abreast of everything from national census developments and impacts of the pandemic to campaign reporting requirements and new outreach materials. Regional co-conveners met on a regular basis to

ensure seamless regional coordination and feed back data and information to the campaign team that carried out virtual communications on behalf of We Count LA.

#### ■ **Multilingual tools and assets developed in over two dozen languages met HTC audiences where they were.**

By partnering with community organizations steeped in the messaging nuances that would resonate best with HTC populations and their concerns, We Count LA was able to deliver on our goal to create resonant materials. For example, We Count LA worked with Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles to develop a series of fact sheets, flyers, and more, partnering with their own coalition of in-language partners, ensuring that Asian languages as varied as Urdu Japanese, Khmer Lao, Hmong and Tamil were represented in these materials.

#### ■ **An innovative digital campaign toolkit kept training and outreach materials in one easily accessible, up-to-date home.**

From weekly campaign updates and peer-to-peer texting training materials

to reporting forms and flyers everything that community partners needed to carry out their outreach was available at their fingertips. In all, these materials were downloaded more than 12,000 times through the course of the campaign. Designed by the community for the community and aimed to be responsive to the diversity of communities in LA, grantees were able to leverage the toolkit resources and build them to be more tailored and effective for their own communities.



#### ■ **High-impact impressions reached HTC Los Angeles residents more than 350 million times.**

Our combined virtual outreach and on-the-ground canvassing tactics reached the screens or doorsteps of Angelenos 350 million times.

## CAMPAIGN OUTREACH:

**300M+** IMPRESSIONSDigital Impressions: **170M+**Phone and text banking: **4.7M**Coalition building: **101K**Door-to-door: **352K**Train-the-trainer: **81K**Other outreach: **3.1M**Community education: **98.6M**Community assistance centers: **27.5K**

## MULTILINGUAL MATERIALS:

Assets downloaded from campaign toolkit: **12K**Languages supported: **20+**Multilingual materials: **30+**

Flyers and fact sheets  
Posters and postcards  
Banners  
Door hangers  
Social and paid media videos  
TV and radio ads



## COMMUNITY PARTNER AND COALITION SUPPORT:

Number of partner updates delivered: **31**Town halls and community forums conducted: **4**Capacity-building trainings conducted: **13**Attendees: **735**

## VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS OUTREACH:

Organic social media impressions: **5.44M**Paid media impressions: **46.3M**Earned media reach/outlet circulation: **27.7M**



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Pushing for an accurate count on the 2020 Census was unlike any other civic engagement effort we've seen.

**Countless barriers, challenges and shifts forced organizers and leaders across the nation to constantly rethink and reinvent their tactics — often within 24-hours notice.**

Navigating through it all has provided us an opportunity to develop learnings and new ways of thinking on how to educate, motivate and persuade communities to participate in civic engagement efforts like the census. The lessons learned that we've shared here from the We Count LA campaign are intended to inform future civic and community engagement efforts — in Los Angeles County and beyond. Each of these lessons also offers insights relevant for proactive planning for the 2030 Census.



### HUMAN CONTACT IS A CRITICAL TOOL FOR BUILDING TRUST AMONG HTC COMMUNITIES

**There is no equivalent for the trust-building power of the human, face-to-face contact of grassroots outreach efforts.** The original central strategy devised by the We Count LA campaign and its coalition of CBOs emphasized in-person outreach and

canvassing for this very reason.

This was particularly essential in an environment where so many both mistrusted and feared the government. Focus group research conducted before and during the census time frame verified the [great apprehension](#) of participating in the census among African Americans, Latinos and other communities of color. Those concerns were echoed during the pandemic through activities such as feedback obtained via phone banking. **Knowing this, the We Count LA coalition needed to look at people eye-to-eye, peer-to-peer, in-language and in-culture and convey trust that**

**participating in the census not only matters, but that it is safe.**

Unfortunately due to the pandemic, social distancing and lockdowns limited We Count LA's ability to make human contact and had a significant, consequent impact on our ability to reach HTC communities.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATION

**No matter the modality or format of future censuses, keeping human contact at the center of outreach tactics will be critical for future efforts.**

## 2.

## A SURROUND-SOUND APPROACH TO REMOTE OUTREACH CAN HELP BRIDGE THE DIGITAL BROADBAND DIVIDE

Given the broadband access issues, combined with a limitation of our ground game efforts, **the challenge to reach our audiences during the pandemic required an approach that would literally surround our audiences in every possible way.** This approach sought to meet the challenge posed by the digital divide in two main ways: using a wide variety of platforms and the hyper-targeting of low-response neighborhoods. We looked to paid media that enhanced what the State's campaign was deploying so that we in fact were not duplicating efforts, but instead using paid media that engaged audiences in a different way than traditional advertising.

**This meant both making new investments and redirecting dollars that had been allocated for on-the-ground canvassing into broad coverage TV and radio partnerships that could reach HTC audiences right in their homes, particularly as people were spending more time in their households, or essential workers in places of business.** Partnerships with Estrella, Univision, and other ethnic media outlets reached millions of Black, Latino, and Asian American audiences with frequent and in-language messages, often delivered through the voice of influential personalities or other interactive, exciting media such as a "Census Fill-Along," which blanketed the 6 p.m. newscast with census-related programming across a "roadblock" of all of Univision's TV, radio and online outlets. We conducted a similar effort that "looked" like editorial content but was in fact integrated marketing with Estrella TV and radio.

Additionally, our research showed that even if many households lacked Internet access, most people in HTC neighborhoods owned a cell phone or had a landline phone. **Our phone banking and peer-to-peer texting outreach efforts EXPLOITED THIS reality by delivering critical, persuasive messages about filling out the census right into**

**the hands and ears of HTC audiences.** These efforts also had the added benefit of redeploying the time and support of volunteers who would have otherwise been going door-to-door prior to the pandemic.

Finally, we didn't forget HTC-adjacent communities like young people of color, who could be a strong force in swaying their peers or family members. To reach this audience segment we blanketed the social media news feed of Los Angeles County residents who access Facebook and Instagram, Spotify and Pandora with impactful videos encouraging them to remind their communities to fill out the census.

### KEY RECOMMENDATION

Regardless if a major digital divide remains or not for future census efforts, a "surround-sound" approach to remote outreach serves as a best practice moving forward, allowing messages to be delivered across multiple platforms, modalities and reaching target audiences where they're at.

## 3.



## REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE MODELS ARE EFFECTIVE FOR ALLOCATING RESOURCES & SYNERGIZING CAMPAIGN EFFORTS

**Collaborating with Los Angeles County, the State of California, the City of Los Angeles, the City of Long Beach, and other partners, was essential in ensuring that the We Count LA campaign effectively used its resources and avoided duplicate efforts.** The state's effort was focused on an air game strategy that was so important in creating awareness from an official messenger on behalf of Census 2020. Los Angeles County emphasized reaching HTC communities while still ensuring that the entirety of the region understood and was encouraged to fill out the census. We Count LA was initially focused on a ground game with CBOs serving as our central ambassadors of outreach.

Our approach was to consider these other key efforts as part of a larger, interwoven, comprehensive regional strategy.

CCF understood that each of these entities' financial and human resources needed to be treated as precious and that each campaign brought different assets and strategies to the table all in service of the same goal of promoting the count. Putting this philosophy into action required great intention, time, resources and leadership, especially on CCF's part — but it was crucial.

Additionally, the support and stewardship of our philanthropic partners allowed us to be the one-stop shop and air traffic control for CBOs in LA County. Instead of having to apply to multiple funding opportunities and reporting back on multiple grants, organizations knew to work directly with CCF on Los Angeles census outreach. This helped avoid duplication and achieve maximum participation of all HTC groups.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATION

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Collaboration across regions and private-public partnerships is a best practice and guiding principle for future civic engagement efforts with a larger unified goal in mind.

## 4.

### A COALITION STRUCTURE WAS CRITICAL TO THE TRUST BUILDING AND COORDINATION NEEDED TO BE AGILE IN THE FACE OF UNPRECEDENTED AND CONSTANTLY SHIFTING CIRCUMSTANCES

**We Count LA's ability to adapt to major disruptions — including a global pandemic and numerous deadline changes — was possible in large part due to the collaborative coalition structure that CCF had put in place from the start.**

The collective understanding and regular, intentional coordination of the campaign team, the Los Angeles Regional Census Table, and the coalition of community partners helped ensure outreach methods were localized to regional needs while ensuring robust campaign coordination at the broader level. These elements were essential to have in place when we needed to pivot.

**Examples of the coalition's agility and coordination included:**

- Regular regional We Count LA Census Table meetings ensured We Count LA messages and responses were coordinated at the county level but still reflected each region's unique needs.
- Adjustments to grantee strategies that allowed them to adapt how they reported on grant outcomes/expectations to reflect the reality at hand.
- We Count LA digital ads that had been originally designed to blanket LA County were redirected to community partners' direct supporters when the lockdown took place and halted all ground operations.
- Multiple cross-coalition town halls that incorporated community partners' direct feedback into our pivot strategy.
- Weekly news digests kept the whole coalition abreast of and fostered coordination with each others' activities.

Had CCF employed a more traditional grant making model with a completely separate digital and advertising strategy, none of this coordination — and indeed, the pivot — would have been possible.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATION

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Future civic engagement efforts can benefit from a similar grant making and coalition infrastructure that allow for grantees and grassroots organizations the flexibility and adaptability to respond to real-time needs and issues of the target audiences. In fact, instead of rebuilding this structure from scratch, state and county organizers should consider re-leveraging this very group of organizations for future efforts, as they are already steeped with their communities and familiar with this organizing structure.



## 5.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS IS ROOTED IN THE POWER & INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

While CCF provided powerful leadership and the provision of tools, capacity building and technical assistance, **the true essence of the We Count LA campaign was derived from the collective power of the CBO coalition.**

In a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship, the CBO partners provided essential knowledge, know-how and influence that were key in informing the strategies and tactics that helped reach HTC audiences across Los Angeles County. This was accomplished by ensuring that these organizations' voices and needs were incorporated throughout the development of the campaign, working closely with representatives from the coalition and garnering feedback from the organizations at key points in the campaign.

Supported by the backbone and administrative leadership of CCF, this coalition

was given a strong foundation upon which to leverage their existing relationships and connections despite the wide variety of challenges that these organizations faced: from having to serve as crisis workers providing basic needs, to navigating funding and staffing issues during the pandemic.

Due to the collaborative relationship, these organizations were able to focus more energy and efforts in being innovative, resilient and agile campaign and thought partners that contributed greatly to getting out the census count in an unprecedented environment. This is indicated powerfully in the fact that **the total amount of outreach completed by the We Count LA campaign exceeded the projected amount of outreach projected among community partners by nearly 25 times (or a 2,400% increase).**

### KEY RECOMMENDATION

Future civic engagement efforts should not only realize the power and influence of community-based organizations for reaching key target audiences, but also elevate these organizations into partners for thought leadership and campaign development.

## 6.

## HTC COMMUNITIES ARE EFFECTIVELY REACHED VIA COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CAMPAIGNS, BACKED BY DATA

Key to the success of the We Count LA campaign was its ability to leverage in-community messengers backed by in-language and multicultural communications tools and resources. By leaning on the knowledge and connections of community leaders and community organizations, We Count LA created campaign materials and tools from a transcreation perspective — **stepping beyond mere “translation” — to align messages, concepts, visuals and graphics to convey the same messages across languages and ensure they were culturally relevant and competent.**

We Count LA also understood that its vast geographic expanse coupled with its ethnic diversity were key factors in how these tools would be developed and tailored. In addition to ensuring the diversity of subjects in the campaign photography were a direct reflection of the wide diversity of Los Angeles County, We Count LA also developed

campaign tools to be completely editable and open access so they could be best tailored by those using them. We Count LA created a suite of materials that would reflect the neighborhoods and regions of Los Angeles County that residents attach great importance to, by developing “We Count Long Beach” or “We Count South LA” logos, for example.

In addition to this transcreation model for the development of campaign materials, We Count LA used data to help drive the placement and dissemination of its culturally relevant materials and tools. **Through sophisticated digital targeting and use of key HTC census tract data, We Count LA created culturally responsive census persuasion ads with in-language narrators in Spanish and Korean — and then delivered these ads directly to Los Angeles residents in low-response neighborhoods who spoke those languages.**

This approach allowed the campaign to not only be culturally relevant but also be targeted to those who would be the most receptive to those tailored messages as well.

### KEY RECOMMENDATION

**To ensure content, messages, and outreach efforts truly reach and engage LA County’s multicultural communities, future civic engagement efforts should consider leveraging a transcreation and open-access content creation and collaboration model leveraging trusted messengers.**



# 7.

## STARTING EARLY GAVE WE COUNT LA A RUNWAY TO BUILD OUR ROBUST ORGANIZING STRUCTURE

CCF made a conscious effort to begin census planning earlier than they did in the 2010 Census. CCF kicked off the work for the 2020 Census in earnest in the summer of 2017 by assessing the landscape and building out a model that could respond to both persistent gaps of counting HTC populations and foreseen challenges that were specific to the 2020 Census, including systematic suppression and the online-focused approach. This enabled CCF to successfully complete the structure that was critical to carry out this campaign by Census Day on April 1, 2020.

**In hindsight, starting at least a full four years earlier would have proved beneficial and enabled CCF to fully complete the infrastructure at least one year ahead of the census.** This would have, in turn, enabled more time both to invest in critical capacity building for CBOs and to start outreach efforts in earnest much earlier.

### KEY RECOMMENDATION

**Future GOTC efforts should kick off at least four years ahead of enumeration to avoid needing to simultaneously build the infrastructure to carry out outreach while conducting outreach itself. The earlier that philanthropy and state leaders can signal about resources, the earlier that community partners can start planning and prepare for contingencies.**



## 8.

## HOMELESS POPULATIONS, IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES, AND VETERANS WERE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO REACH DUE TO EXTERNAL, COMPOUNDED FACTORS

Despite a tremendous amount of outreach to immigrant communities, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness through trusted messengers, persuasive ads, and direct face-to-face canvassing where possible, persistent, **external challenges like funding and COVID-19 limited these communities' willingness to participate in the census — and We Count LA's ability to persuade them.**

Our Linea De Ayuda with Univision and field reporting showed that immigrant communities didn't truly believe that the census was confidential, and their fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement coming to their homes was an insurmountable barrier to their

participation due to constant and scaled suppression efforts. Given COVID-19's dramatic impact on immigrants and people of color, community partners tasked with reaching these groups were particularly taxed, thus limiting census outreach. We made multiple attempts to reach people experiencing homelessness through food banks, grocery stores, laundromats and at-home sheltering locations, but precautions related to direct outreach to these populations.

Finally, many veteran serving organizations did not have the capacity to support census outreach when the priority was to support COVID-19 rapid response efforts. Many organizations had to redeploy their staff and capacity to simply provide basic essentials to the veteran community.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION

**Persistent, rooted challenges stand in the way of immigrants, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness from participating in the census that no amount of outreach from CCF or We Count LA was able to surmount. These underlying factors must be addressed and these communities need to be supported prior to census outreach in 2030 to ensure they are represented in the next count.**

## 9.

## CONTINUE TO INVEST IN BUILDING CAPACITY

If the pandemic taught us anything, it was the need for community-based groups to deepen their skill set in virtual tactics ranging from data collection and translation to media training. **In particular, digital engagement must be the centerpiece for investing in community-based groups' successful campaigns.** Even groups with the most expansive knowledge of digital engagement strategies found themselves in a position of having to sharpen their creativity particularly in an environment when it seemed the whole world went online.

With the pandemic persisting almost a year later, it is incumbent upon the non-profit sector to further invest in how to increase its effectiveness in digital engagement and other virtual strategies such as texting and phone banking outreach. This requires re-thinking infrastructure, training, data collection, database and email management, software, hardware and other equipment needs for groups to stay on the pulse of an increasingly virtual world.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION

**Future civic engagement efforts must incorporate capacity building as a building, particularly with a focus on digital engagement, block for success.**

# 10. DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF EXTERNAL PARTNERS



CCF is committed to advancing systemic change in a range of ways — from grantmaking and other strategies on education, immigration, health and more. Census outreach and education is just one of CCF's many priorities. **As a result, the foundation needs to rely not only on partners with various expertise to boost its own gaps in capacity for such an intensive effort as the census 2020 campaign.**

Because CCF understood the campaign needed thought partnership as well as hands on execution, it identified Fenton Communications as a partner early to help develop the campaign and

work alongside the CBO network to support and amplify the work. Bringing in a partner with an understanding of philanthropy, community engagement as well as overall communications strategy — with a multicultural lens was an important aspect of the campaign's success. In addition, CCF recognized the critical role of independent evaluation to help record and inform future census and civic engagement efforts. As such, CCF partnered with Action Network, Advancement Project, Engage R&D, and USC ERI as essential partners. Both Fenton and Engage became part of the campaign's brain trust to support not only the CBO campaign itself, but

allow CCF to focus its efforts on leading the campaign and coordinating with key stakeholders such as the state and LA County, funders and other important partners.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION

**Leverage the power of external partners for intensive and cohesive civic engagement efforts. Partnership is critical for success.**

# CCF WISHES TO THANK

Ballmer Group  
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The James Irvine Foundation  
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ActiveSGV  
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AltaMed Health Services Corp  
Anahuak Youth Soccer Association  
Antelope Valley Partners for Health (AVPH)  
Armenian National Committee of America - Western Region (ANCA - WR)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles (AAAJ - LA)  
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement  
Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON)  
Asian Youth Center

#### B

BAJI  
Black Women for Wellness  
Building Skills Partnership

#### C

California Black Women's Health Project  
California Calls  
California Native Vote Project  
CANGRESS  
Central for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE)  
Central City neighborhood Partners (CCNP)  
Centro CHA, Inc.  
Child Care Resource Center, Inc.  
Children's Institute, Inc.  
Chinatown Service Center  
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE)  
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Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)  
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County (CCALAC)  
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment  
Community Development Technologies Center (CDTech)  
Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norte America (COFEM)  
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) California  
Crystal Stairs, Inc.

#### D

Disability Community Resource Center

#### E

El Monte Promise Foundation  
El Nido Family Centers  
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)  
Equality California Institute

#### F

Families In Schools  
Filipino Migrant Center

#### G

Golden State Opportunity Foundation  
Greater Long Beach Interfaith Community Organization(ICO)

#### H

Homies Unidos, Inc.  
Human Services Association (HSA)

#### I

InnerCity Struggle  
Instituto de Avance Integral Latino (IDEAL) CDC  
International Rescue Committee (IRC)

#### K

Korean American Coalition (KAC)  
Korean American Federation of Los Angeles (KAFLA)  
Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance (KIWA)  
Korean Resource Center (KRC)  
Koreatown Youth & Community Center, Inc. (KYCC)

#### L

LA Partnership  
LA Voice  
Lancaster Museum & Public Art Foundation  
Latino Equality Alliance  
Legacy LA Youth Development Corporation  
Long Beach Forward  
Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition (LBIRC)  
Los Angeles Black Worker Center (LABWC)

#### M

Mar Vista Family Center  
Maternal and Child Health Access  
Meet Each Need with Dignity (MEND)  
Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF)

#### N

NALEO Educational Fund  
NewStart Housing Corporation

#### O

ONEgeneration

#### P

Pacoima Beautiful  
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Parent Engagement Academy  
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#### R

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Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)

#### T

Toberman Neighborhood Center, Inc.

#### U

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#### V

Vision Y Compromiso

#### W

Watts Century Latino Organization

#### Y

YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles