



Census Process and Participation

Is Participation Mandatory?

Getting a Complete and Accurate Census count is critical.

Yes. Because so much is at stake, your **participation is required by law under Title 13 of the U.S. Code**, even if you completed another survey from the Census Bureau. Refusal to respond can result in a fine.

The law also states that it is illegal to tell someone NOT to participate in the Census.

If you choose to participate but leave a question blank, the Census Bureau will likely use a statistical process to fill in any missing information.

If you choose not to answer the Census or respond to an enumerator or Census taker, the Bureau will complete the survey or questionnaire on your behalf, inserting answers based on what they believe is the make-up of your household according to statistics and Census tract characteristics.

Census law also states that anyone who “willfully gives any answer that is false” on the questionnaire may be fined up to \$500.

Is My Information Protected?

The confidentiality of Census data is protected under Title 13 of the U.S. Code. All responses will be encrypted so that only the Census Bureau can access the information. Once the data are received, the information is no longer online.

No data or tabulation can be produced or released that can identify an individual. The Census Bureau cannot release or publish any identifiable information about individuals, households or businesses even to law

enforcement. Additionally, the **Bureau doesn't cross-check the information with any other sources.**

Census responses cannot be accessed or used against you by any government or law enforcement agency--not by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), or by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The information can't count against you. For example, your responses can't be used to determine eligibility for government benefits or housing vouchers.

The data collected can only be used for statistical purposes. The Census Bureau can release anonymized information about demographic groups at a level as detailed as a neighborhood which informs planning, service and resource delivery and research.

Individual records may not be released for at least 72 years.

All Census staff and contractors take a lifetime oath to protect personal information. Violations may result in stiff penalties, including a fine of up to \$250,000 and/or up to 5 years in prison.

Is there anything different in this Census?

The Decennial Census is conducted every 10 years. The 2020 Census is different logistically from the one that took place in 2010.

The 2020 Census will be asking most residents to complete the questionnaire online for the first time. While cost effective, it may be a hardship for some who lack access to a reliable Internet connection or for those who are unfamiliar with computers. In New York State, more than 13% of households do not have any access to the Internet at their home. While paper and phone access is available, online participation will be emphasized and may cause confusion for some. Thus, libraries and other public agencies are working to provide access to computers for Census completion to overcome the digital divide.

In response to a reduction in federal funding, the U.S. Census Bureau has reduced staffing levels from previous years. Further, prior to the 2010 Census, the bureau issued employment waivers to hire noncitizens who were legally permitted to work in the United States and possessed the required skills that were unavailable. As of this time, there are no plans to issue a waiver.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Commerce proposed adding a question about citizenship on the 2020 Decennial Census survey. Although the question does not appear on the survey form as federal courts and the U.S. Supreme Court struck down this effort, the confusion resulting from reports about the proposed question may reduce the response rates to the Census, especially in certain communities across the country.

How Can I Complete the Census Survey?

Census day is April 1, 2020. Between March 2020 through April 1, 2020, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the Census. Regardless of how you respond, the questions are the same and the confidentiality of the information is protected under the law. By you responding and taking the initiative, your voice counts! You can respond **online**, by **phone** or by **paper**.

The 2020 Census is the first time that an online response option is available to complete the survey. Online responses will be accepted starting in March 2020.

Most households will receive a paper invitation in the mail requesting them to complete the Census **online (Internet-first households)**. You may even use your mobile device to complete the short questionnaire. The invitation will contain a unique code to enter online at **respond.census.gov**. By entering this code, your address will automatically appear. You may still respond to the online questionnaire without the code but you will be required to enter your address.

Your PIN/unique ID will also allow you to return to your questionnaire and submit the form later.

When responding online, make sure the address begins with “HTTPS” and the site has a lock symbol.

Some households will receive a printed questionnaire, which they can mail postage-free.

Self-response is the first phase in the Census process. If a household fails to respond online, by phone, or by paper form, the Census Bureau will send multiple mailings to your address and dispatch a Census taker or enumerator to follow-up in person to gather the information. After each contact attempt, the enumerator will leave a “Notice of Visit” form encouraging the household to respond to the Census. After three days of attempting to contact someone in the household, the Census taker may

begin contacting neighbors to get a proxy response. Or the Census Bureau may respond on your behalf by consulting administrative records or imputing a response using statistics and neighborhood characteristics.

Is the Census Accessible?

You can respond to the Census online, by phone or by mail. Online, the Census questionnaire is available in **English and 12 additional languages** (Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese). Respondents will be able to toggle between the languages.

Questionnaire assistance is also available in the 12 non-English languages and includes telecommunications assistance for the deaf.

The printed questionnaire is available in English and Spanish. The Spanish language survey will be sent to addresses in bilingual tracts (Based on the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, 20% or more of the households are recognized as having at least one person aged 15 or older who speaks Spanish and does not speak English very well).

Resource materials and language guides and glossaries (video and print) are available in 59 Non-English languages (e.g., Bengali, Farsi, German, Greek, Hebrew, Romanian, Serbian, Turkish) as well as in American Sign Language, braille, and large print.

You can also respond by phone in English or in the 12 Non-English languages. There is a separate phone number for each language.

You can access TDD assistance at 844-467-2020.

The Census Bureau is recruiting enumerators who will be able to communicate in American Sign Language and additional languages.

If you prefer, you may choose to have another member of the household respond to the Census or interact with the Census taker on your behalf.

Since more than 200 languages are spoken in New York State, community-based organizations and others are working to assist non-English speakers and those with low-English proficiency in an attempt to overcome linguistic challenges.

What Information Does the Census Collect?

<https://census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires/2020.html>

The 2020 Census form includes only a few questions. The information requested for every person in the household, includes:

- Name
- Relationships to Person completing the form
- Sex
- Age
- Date of Birth
- Hispanic origin
- Race

The person completing the form is asked whether the home is owned or rented and about the number of people residing at that address.

Names are requested to ensure that each household member is counted only once. There is no requirement that you use a name that is on your official documents. Therefore, you may use the name you feel most comfortable with using.

Relationship information gives the Census Bureau a snapshot of important trends in society. The information assists the government in determining funding for nutrition and education programs, housing programs and social services. The Bureau seeks to identify husbands and wives, children and step-children, and siblings, in addition to other family and non-family relationships. **For the first time, people will be able to identify as a “same-sex husband/wife/spouse” or as a “same-sex unmarried partner.”**

The current Census form restricts the responses to “male” and “female.” Notwithstanding advocacy efforts by some, this question fails to acknowledge sexual orientation and gender identity: transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming individuals. Since the Census does not cross reference answers, LGBTQI advocates suggest you answer the questions in whichever way feels best to you as it is critical that everyone be counted.

If you don't have a regular address, you can still complete the Census using the address you stay at most often—even if that address isn't a residence. You may use the address of a shelter that you frequent or a geographic address where you “couch-surf” most nights or frequently.

Data on race are used to help ensure equal opportunity and to provide for certain government programs. Race data is also used to enforce protections against race-based discrimination, monitor compliance with the Voting Rights Act and document racial disparities.

The 2020 form allows individuals to select from among 15 racial categories or to write in races not listed. You may choose more than one race. For the first time, individuals may also identify their ethnic or national origin as part of the race question.

Is there a Citizenship Question on the 2020 Census form?

No. There was bipartisan opposition to this proposed addition. New York State among other states, advocates and others challenged the proposed question in federal court arguing that the question would depress responses in immigrant communities. In June 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Administration's official reason for adding the question was not adequate and blocked the question from being added.

However, community advocates and other stakeholders remain concerned about the potential chilling effect of this effort. The current climate and rhetoric could increase apprehension and mistrust, and deter participation especially among immigrant communities—placing immigrant households at increased risk of being undercounted. Additionally, recent immigrants often live in transient and complicated housing arrangements. Thus, these households may not view themselves as cohesive units. Therefore, numerous immigrant-oriented service organizations and civil rights groups are conducting outreach and education to encourage immigrant populations including undocumented residents and mixed-status families to respond to the Census questionnaire.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/661932989/how-the-2020-census-citizenship-question-ended-up-in-court>

Who do I Count?

You should count everyone who is living or staying in your home as of April 1, 2020. To ensure a complete and accurate count, the **Census Bureau counts people at their usual residence, which is the place where they live and sleep most of the time**, with a few exceptions. People who do not have a usual residence should be counted where they are on Census Day (April 1, 2020).

For guidance about special circumstances, (e.g., Babies; People relocating, U.S. Military Personnel; People in Shelters, health care facilities, or in correctional facilities), see: <https://2020census.gov/en/who-to-count.html>

What About College Students?

- College students who live away from home should count themselves at the on-or off-campus residence where they live and sleep most of the time, even if they are at their permanent home on April 1, 2020.
- Foreign students living and attending college in the United States should be counted at the on-or off-campus residence where they live and sleep most of the time.

U.S. college students who are living and attending college outside the United States are not counted in the Census.

What is the Census Timeline?

The Census will be conducted between mid-March and the end of July. This period is divided into two phases: the "self-response-only" phase and the "non-response follow-up" phase.

By April 1, 2020, you will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond. This is the self-response period.

By mid-May, the Census Bureau will be dispatching enumerators or Census takers to conduct follow-ups for households that have not responded. If no one answers the door after several attempts, the Census taker will either use administrative records to try to determine the information for that household and/or attempt to confirm information from neighbors. These estimates tend to be inaccurate and can leave many New Yorkers out of the count, impacting our federal funding and our Congressional representation. That is why encouraging friends, family, neighbors and co-workers to self-reply immediately upon receipt of the official notice is important to our goal of achieving a complete and accurate count.

In December 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau delivers the counts to Congress and the President as required under the law and in March 2021, the Census Bureau sends redistricting counts to states to be used to redraw legislative districts based on population shifts.