

**Maryland 2020 Census  
Local Complete Count Committees  
Virtual Regional Meetings  
A Review of Challenges, Ideas,  
and Successes of Census Efforts Across  
Maryland Amid the COVID-19 Crisis**

Prepared for:

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## Local Complete Count Committees

### A Review of Challenges, Ideas, and Successes of Census Efforts Across Maryland Amid the COVID-19 Crisis

#### Summary

As the Maryland Department of Planning (Planning) and the Maryland Census team continue with the self-response phase of our outreach this spring and gear up as the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) aims to begin their door-to-door enumeration later this summer, Maryland has positioned itself as one of the nation's leaders in terms of outreach and self-response rates. As of May 14, 2020, Maryland is ranked #12 in the entire U.S. (63.1%) in self-response for the 2020 Census and we are second on the entire East Coast in self-response, a mere 1.1 percent behind the East Coast leader, Virginia (64.2%).

Eighteen of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions (23 counties and Baltimore City) are equal to or ahead of the national average of 59.1%, and 20 of the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland are higher than 50% self-response rate. ***Please note that the self-response rate does NOT yet include the number of people that will be counted by the USCB as part of their door-to-door enumeration phase, which is currently scheduled to begin in mid-August 2020.***

Maryland has four counties with more than a 70% self-response rate with Carroll County at 75.2% (30th best county in the U.S out of more than 3,200 counties), Howard County at 73.0%, Harford County at 71.4%, and Frederick County at 70.8%. Several additional counties are above 60%, including Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Baltimore, Washington, St. Mary's, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Wicomico and Prince George's counties.

Currently there are four jurisdictions below 50%, including Somerset (49.4%), Garrett (46.4%) and Worcester counties (29.7%) and Baltimore City (49.2%). One of the significant reasons for the low percentages in Garrett and Worcester counties is the high percentage of secondary home ownership in Deep Creek Lake and Ocean City. The Census team is working closely with all of the low response areas and is targeting low response Census tracts across the state to make sure every Marylander is counted in 2020.

During these uncertain and unprecedented times as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Planning recently held regional virtual meetings with local Complete Count Committees (CCCs) from each county and Baltimore City to gain perspective on how they are adapting their Census efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the "stay-at-home" order, Planning shifted outreach efforts from interfacing with communities in public places to relying heavily on reaching people in their homes through diverse marketing tactics.

Knowing that Marylanders are now mainly in their homes, Planning's enhanced efforts now expand beyond the scope of our original communications plan that relied in part on out-of-home marketing tools, including online marketing and outreach through social media, digital advertising, radio/TV advertising, and print publications. These assets have also been translated to accommodate the Spanish-speaking community. As part of our new post-COVID-19 approach, Planning has also reached out to school systems to provide Census messaging at school lunch programs to reach families most in need during this crisis.

Other efforts Planning has ramped up recently include utilizing the assistance of trusted leaders and organizations. While this was always part of the original plan, now more than ever, Planning is relying on our local-based trusted leaders to share the messaging on why it is critical for a complete count of all Marylanders in the 2020 Census. Planning staff developed and distributed a letter and flyer to faith leaders around the state, providing information on ways they can assist in spreading the word to their congregants of the importance of the 2020 Census. We are also utilizing digital communications via SMS messaging (text) and email to reach people on their computers, phone and other smart devices. This tactic, utilized in both English and Spanish, incorporates the use of subscription lists to send messaging to individuals encouraging them to complete the Census and encourage others to do so. It also provides outreach tools and suggestions to those who have already completed the Census.

Planning has also reached out to a critical partner - Maryland's business community - to communicate with the general public about the 2020 Census. Planning reached out to energy companies that service Maryland, including BGE, Pepco, Delmarva Power, Choptank Electric, and the Southern Maryland Cooperative. We have requested they share Census messaging on customer billing, websites, and social media pages. We have had considerable positive feedback and engagement, and will continue working with these and other companies. Additionally, we are working closely with Chambers of Commerce across the state to include messaging on their social media, websites, and newsletters.

In addition to Planning adapting our communications and outreach plans in new ways as a result of COVID-19, local CCCs have had to adjust as well. Planning coordinated local CCC virtual meetings by region to discuss outreach tactics across the state. In bringing together the local CCCs, our goal was to allow for a forum of discussion among county chairs to develop a picture of challenges, plans and efforts faced by each. The meetings allowed us to share best practices, innovative ideas for community engagement and develop solutions and goals for obtaining complete counts of all Marylanders.

## **Regional County CCC Meetings**

Planning has helped to facilitate regional meetings of local complete count committees during the last several weeks. The first round of meetings were as follows:

Eastern Shore - 4/9/20: Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester counties

Southern Maryland - 4/14/20: Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's counties

Western Maryland - 4/15/20: Garrett, Allegany, Washington, and Frederick counties

Northern Maryland - 4/17/20: Carroll, Baltimore, and Harford counties

Metro Area Maryland - 4/20/20: Baltimore City, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel counties

To keep building on our outreach success so far by taking advantage of the real-time self-response results, the second round of regional CCC meetings will be as follows:

Metro Area Maryland - 5/18/20

Northern Maryland - 5/19/20

Southern Maryland - 5/19/20

Eastern Shore - 5/21/20

Western Maryland - 5/21/20

## **Best Practices/Successes**

Maryland's local CCC meetings revealed an abundance of ideas and creative ways jurisdictions are reaching out to their communities to encourage completion of the Census.

Several programs, best practices, and marketing initiatives, were shared on the regional calls, including:

**Social Media:** Nearly all of the CCCs are utilizing Facebook for announcements, challenges, contests with prizes such as gift cards, increased paid advertising, partnerships with local government agencies and nonprofits to promote their Census content. Others, such as Prince George's County, have used Facebook to host Census virtual block parties with local celebrities, the County Executive, and other local elected officials. Social media is also being used for Public Service Announcements with local leaders and trusted community members. While some CCC's are tagging the Maryland Census 2020 page in their posts, it would be helpful if CCCs moving forward would tag or add the Census hashtag (#2020MDCensus) to their posts and providing a link for viewers to complete the Census form at [my2020Census.gov](https://my2020Census.gov).

**County School Lunch Programs:** In order to reach traditionally hard-to-count (HTC) populations, many of the CCC's have partnered with local school lunch programs to distribute Census materials such as bags, chip clips, cups, flyers (in English and Spanish), and preschool activity books.

**Faith-Based Outreach:** Knowing that trusted leaders are often the heads of faith communities, several counties are connecting with their local faith-based leaders to promote the Census during their online services and food distribution activities.

**Census Virtual Town Halls/Monthly Meetings:** Two counties have held virtual town halls organized by legislators and/or local elected officials to promote the Census through a more dynamic and interactive means. A town hall has also been held targeting the Spanish speaking community. County governments, including Wicomico, Allegany, Calvert and Prince George's are staying engaged with their committee members by holding virtual CCC meetings.

**Fire and Police Departments:** Several counties have asked their fire and police departments to promote the Census by placing information on their electronic billboard signage at their precincts or houses. They also sent Census-related flyers for distribution to emergency services locations and provided to 911 dispatch staff as well. This is a valuable partnership as these organizations are excellent resources to spread awareness regarding the importance of Census funding for emergency services.

**Local Public School System:** Partnerships with the local public school systems have been a key form of communication between county CCCs and their residents. One innovative idea out of Harford County was a book drive to distribute more than 600 books to local students that included Census informational flyers in English and Spanish. Some school systems also included Census information in the learning packets distributed to families for remote schooling.

**Media:** With people adhering to the stay at home order, reaching Marylanders in their homes is more critical than ever. Counties are taking advantage of their media partnerships with TV, radio, print, and digital advertisers to extend their original media buys or acquire bonus airtime/spots. Some counties, depending on location and demographics, have built partnerships with multicultural media outlets that include outreach in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi, African, etc.

**Partnerships with Nonprofit Organizations:** Local CCCs are partnering with key organizations to promote the Census to the homeless, low-income families, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and others. These organizations know their communities and have relationships with those who use their services. Having them serve as trusted voices is a valuable asset to access hard-to-reach (HTR) populations.

**Census Ambassadors:** Several counties are using community leaders, elected officials, faith leaders, and other trusted community members to serve as official "Census Ambassadors." This provides a great opportunity to engage community members, allowing them to play a role in the success of the mission.

## **County Outreach Opportunities**

Outreach has taken on an entirely different interpretation during the COVID-19 crisis. What once were plans to hold community events and rallies have now become efforts to reach communities in innovative ways through remote efforts. The regional virtual meetings offered an opportunity to discuss the means by which counties are reaching out.

**Food Bank Packages:** To reach HTC/HTR areas, several counties are using creative ways to connect with their populations. Charles County, for instance, is creating packages highlighting the importance of the Census to social services resources. They are also including Census flyers, apparel buttons in English and Spanish and other languages to ensure different demographics are targeted. Additionally, local CCC's are partnering with school lunch programs to reach those in need of food during these difficult times. Calvert County is also working with programs providing services to the homeless population and including Census messaging.

**Facebook Influencers:** An opportunity to reach HTC/HTR areas being utilized by the local CCCs is the use of Facebook influencers. These individuals or groups include elected officials, faith leaders, and other community leaders. An influencer could even be popular individuals who run large, well-regarded Facebook groups such as restaurant pages highlighting take-out during the COVID-19 crisis, local radio stations, and/or disc jockeys. Charles County has connected with local community influencers who are assisting in promoting the Census on community Facebook pages. These influencers also use their pages to hold virtual Census events as was recently done in Prince George's County with elected officials and a local radio station.

**Post Office Posters:** Calvert and St. Mary's counties have put up large Census posters at post offices to target low-reporting/HTC areas that do not receive mail at homes and rely on post office boxes and as a reminder to the general public.

**Partnerships with the local elected officials:** Planning and local CCC's have encouraged county leaders in each county to post Census messaging. We encourage individual counties to include Census messaging on county emails to both the public and county employees. Also, local CCCs are promoting virtual badges or awards on websites and social media recognizing Census self-response accomplishments among towns as a great way to showcase those doing a great job but also can promote competition among towns.

**Tri-County AARP/Census 2020 Forum:** Charles, Calvert and St. Mary's counties originally planned to hold a tri-county forum in mid-April led by Congressman Steny Hoyer, Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen, Governor Larry Hogan or Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford, State Senator Mike Miller, Maryland Veterans Affairs Secretary George Owings, and the presidents of the three boards of county commissioners in Southern Maryland. The goal was to have national, state, and county leaders inspire and energize CCC members and volunteers to provide the final push to reach historically undercounted populations and HTR residents. The counties are still hoping to hold this event once restrictions have been lifted or they will hold a virtual forum in the event social distancing continues into the fall.

**Public School System:** As school officials are communicating with families, sharing Census messaging in an excellent way to reach all Marylanders. For example, St. Mary's CCC asked their school system to contact principals to request the usage of Census messaging, including flyers, in emails to teachers and families/students. The CCCs are also working to get messaging onto the individual school and school board websites that contain a direct link to the Census online and requesting posts on the school board's social media accounts. Allegany County has also partnered with their school system to ask teachers to send Census information via texts to parents.

**Sticker Program:** Reaching people through out-of-home advertising has taken on a new meaning during the COVID-19 crisis. However, there are advertising tools to reach people in their homes beyond TV and radio. Allegany County created Census stickers to include in Meals On Wheels food packages, pizza boxes, food distribution items, etc. Several other counties have included stickers on pizza boxes and other fast food items.

**Convenience Markets:** Though there may be approval processes to go through, placing Census flyers in convenience stores, markets and grocery stores can serve to reach communities. Harford County has been successful placing Census flyers at Royal Farms and Wawa convenience stores.

**Restaurant/Fast Food:** Many counties and organizations purchased Census promotional products to encourage participation. Once Marylanders started staying in their homes and gatherings, both large and small events, were cancelled, most of these items became obsolete. Finding ways to distribute them in communities is essential before they go to waste. Carroll County started utilizing rack cards and other Census promotional items originally intended for events and asked local restaurants and fast food chains to include Census flyers and items in to-go bags.

**Face Masks Program:** Harford County has partnered with volunteer organizations to make face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the distribution in these HTC/HTR areas, they are including Census information.

**Phone Banking:** Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties are using phone banking to reach HTC areas. While the county government calls are not Census specific, the purpose is to check-in with the household/resident, inform them of county resources available, provide them with COVID-19-related information, and remind them to fill out the Census.

**Co-messaging COVID-19 and Census:** Montgomery County is creating a uniform message to communities affected by COVID-19 in low-response tract areas. They are also creating a unique mailer for this initiative as they continue to review the tracts.

**Whatsapp:** Montgomery County is using this platform as a way to connect with immigrant communities who use this application rather than regular texting through mobile providers. This platform is used not only to text with friends and family within the United States, but also across the world.

**Easy to Read Data:** Wicomico and Prince George's counties have made it simple for their residents to be updated on self-response rates by creating a "thermometer" graphic to show their county self-response rates (compared to the overall Maryland self-response rate). This visual tool is easy to understand and is similar to a thermometer used during a fundraising campaign.

**School Report Cards:** Anne Arundel County report cards are expected to be distributed to 85,000 households and will include multilingual Census inserts.

## **Challenges Faced by County Committees**

Even before the COVID-19 crisis led to a stay-at-home order, many local CCCs faced significant challenges in reaching HTC communities. Our regional meetings allowed for a discussion of the issues faced by each county and also offered opportunities for ideas as to how best to approach them.

**Internet/Computer Access:** With the online method of completing Census forms serving as the primary tool for completion, internet and computer access is of great importance. However, many communities are without broadband, computers, or other smart devices. In the elderly community there are significant members who do not understand technology or may not use it at all. Counties may need to rely on a paper Census form to be sent for self-response rates to increase. The challenge is to find ways to encourage older Marylanders to complete the form and mail it in.

Another challenging group are school-aged children. Public school systems have identified many families during this crisis who do not have access to computers and the internet. In order to resolve this issue, some counties have provided laptops to children and have included Census information during the distribution. Additionally, there are areas in Maryland where the internet is not available. Rural counties are more significantly impacted by the inability of residents to complete the forms online. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, local libraries were going to serve as a hub for people to fill out their Census. Now, however, counties must find alternative ways to offer the internet to their communities in need.

**P.O. Boxes:** Post office boxes are often ignored for mailings, including Census forms and reminder postcards. This greatly impacts disproportionately rural areas of Maryland, including the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland. This is a recognized problem, and inserts and postcards will be distributed to all P.O. box addresses to ensure those residents are contacted. In some places, including rural areas, the U.S. Postal Service does not provide home delivery. Several counties worked with the local postmasters to have postcards sent or delivered to the P.O. boxes of residents in those areas.

**Rental Properties/Vacation Homes:** Worcester and Garrett counties have a unique issue, as both counties have a large percentage of second homes in Deep Creek Lake and Ocean City. One of the major challenges in these areas are seasonal tourist areas and many of the properties are rentals or secondary residences. Another concern is people may not be properly reporting their primary residence. There was some discussion among the western Maryland group about using Facebook Groups for rental property owners. This could prove beneficial for the Ocean City area as well.

**Media:** While the Washington D.C. and Baltimore suburbs may more easily attain earned media, other surrounding counties do not have the same type of media coverage or saturation. These areas have local publications that they rely on for such stories, but often miss out on TV news opportunities. Some counties, such as Anne Arundel, have used their own local county TV channel to promote the Census.

**Translation Services:** In order to target specific demographics, counties need the proper tools for outreach. One of the most important tools is the ability to communicate with the people who live in your communities. This leads to the need for translation services. For counties without built-in translation services, budget constraints can present a significant hindrance. A significant amount of the Census materials have been translated in multiple languages, including flyers, rack cards and social media advertising.

**Access to Data:** While some counties have access to sufficient data information with the support of capable local data departments, some counties do not have this type of support. This creates missed opportunities to identify, target, and learn more about their low-response tracts. Planning is happy to provide assistance for those counties who do not have access to data.

## **Ways Planning is Providing Assistance to Local CCCs**

During our regional CCC meetings, Planning asked participants ways in which our staff can support their local efforts and assist them with their goals. Planning will continue working with the local CCCs to aid them in outreach, marketing and data-driven efforts to increase their self-response rates.

**Interfaith Leader Outreach Lists:** Several counties indicated they would find it useful for Planning to provide them with interfaith leaders contact information, especially in rural and HTC areas. However, as this list is not maintained by our agency, we would need to partner with the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives to assist in facilitating this request. *In progress.*

**Census Data:** Some counties do not have access to substantial data and therefore have requested Planning staff assistance to decipher and assist with data analysis when researching HTC areas. *In progress.*

**Grant Extensions:** Several counties have inquired about grant extensions in order to continue using grant funding resources. Planning will extend the deadline to Dec. 31, 2020 to give the grantees time to continue outreach until the self-response deadline of Oct. 31, 2020, and the time to submit final documentation until the end of the year. *In progress.*

**Regional CCC Meetings:** Planning will be scheduling another round of regional CCC meetings for the end of May to check in once again with local chairs as to plans, adjustments and needs. *In progress.*

## **Regional Summaries**

### **Eastern Shore Region**

Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties

- Working with school systems to provide Census messaging in packages at school lunch programs
- Working with nonprofits to reach HTC communities
- Partnering with the faith community to have pastors serve as trusted leaders of Census information
- Working with "Census Ambassadors" in HTC areas
- Writing letters to the editor for local publications
- Use of visual thermometer to show county's progress in self-response rates
- Using Census decals on county vehicles
- Census signage at local markets and convenience stores
- Use of paid digital marketing

### **Southern Maryland Region**

Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's counties

- Using social media
- Paid advertising in print, radio and digital media
- Sending postcards to HTC communities from which they anticipate continued low self-response rates
- Finding ways to deal with challenges of broadband issues
- County Commissioners recorded PSAs and they are shared through different methods with the community
- Census mailers to HTC communities
- Working with school lunch programs
- Working with food banks and Meals on Wheels to include Census messaging in packages
- Partnering with nonprofits such as those serving the homeless population
- Use of Facebook influencers and community "Census Ambassadors"
- Targeted mailers to P.O. Boxes and placing posters in post offices
- Working with the faith community
- Provided Census flyers to emergency responders to leave with families after calls to homes
- Pizza Box stickers
- Response Rate Web Badge
- Utilizing USCB Challenge Toolkit

## **Western Maryland Region**

Allegany, Frederick, Garrett, and Washington counties

- Facebook Groups focused on vacation rentals and rental property owners
- Community action groups assisting with spreading awareness
- Working with faith leaders
- Working with colleges regarding student counts
- Providing Census stickers to add to packaging at food distribution centers
- Advertising on AM radio, which the senior population listens to regularly
- Working with nonprofits to reach the homeless population

## **Northern Maryland**

Baltimore County, Carroll, and Harford counties

- Census information provided in employee lounges at establishments such as grocery, convenience and liquor stores. Rack cards, buttons and magnets (previously purchased promo items) also offered to these establishments to share with employees and patrons
- Census materials, handouts and preschool activity books provided to school lunch programs
- Distributed 600 books at book drives with Census flyers to HTC areas
- CCC members have reached out to businesses and organizations requesting they advertise the Census through their social media
- Emails and flyers to local faith leaders for distribution
- Daily emails from County Executive sent to county employees including Census messaging
- Paid email blast to all email subscribers in Carroll County and 3"x3" stickers on the front of the Carroll County Times (Wednesday and Sunday - largest distribution days)
- Earned media stories in local papers, ad buys with local radio station- WTTR, and filmed for a local cable TV show- Carroll Helping Carroll, which is now playing repeatedly on the local cable channel
- Harford County has done paid advertising through the collaborative Metropolitan Group to include local newspapers and 3 radio stations, billboards that include local leaders/celebrities
- English/Spanish rack cards at laundromats, Latino grocery stores and restaurants
- Harford County has partnered with volunteer organizations to make face masks during COVID-19 to distribute to HTC/HTR areas and attaching Census information

## **Metro Area Region**

Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties

- Working with media outlets that serve other languages, including:
  - Telemundo
  - Radio America
  - Korean and Chinese Newspapers
- Utilizing WhatsApp for the Spanish-speaking community
- Aggressive social media plans and working with Facebook groups as well as hosting Facebook Live events. Paid social media advertising
- Holding virtual town hall meetings
- Working with “Census Ambassadors” to connect with a vast network of people
- Co-messaging with the business community
- Phone banking
- Working with nonprofits to reach targeted populations
- Messaging with meal distribution centers via palm cards
- Partnering with local celebrities for virtual events and messaging, including promoting on popular radio stations with well-regarded on-air personalities
- Distribution of messaging relating Census impacts on healthcare and emergency services
- Using Data from Planning and USCB maps to target low self-response rate area
- Montgomery County has an advisory group that also offers free translation services for their projects
- Communicating with Mothers' Groups such as Mocha Moms and Jack and Jill Clubs Prince George's and Montgomery
- Anne Arundel County is working with their School System to include Census messaging in report cards sent to the parents of all students
- Anne Arundel County also has a Spanish Podcast and Cable TV show on the county's cable channel during which they highlight the importance of the Census
- Howard County also did a big Census Day push with paid advertising through Radio One and Facebook targeting HTC tracts



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Larry Hogan, Governor  
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor



Maryland Department of Planning  
Robert McCord, Secretary  
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**CensusMaryland**

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