2020 Census: Complete Count

By Cathy O’Shea

The 2020 Census is just seven months away, in April 2020. It comes around every 10 years and has much impact on our government. It is expected that 80 percent of the people will respond online. The League of Women Voters is going to be focused on ensuring that we get a complete count. To that end, we’ll keep you up-to-date on what is happening in King County to ensure a complete count here. Most of the information about the Census this month is from a LWVUS webinar to lay out the basics. Next month we’ll focus on what’s happening in Washington State and King County and keep you up-to-date from now until April. Mark your calendars for April 1, 2020, Census Day!

Let’s talk through some Census basics and the action plans that LWVUS is putting together.

Census Basics

What Is the Census?

• The Census is a once-a-decade population and housing count of all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Island areas.

• Census results are used to determine the apportionment of Congressional districts and of state legislative districts.

• The federal government uses Census data to distribute more than $675 billion in federal funds annually.

What About the Citizenship Question?

The federal administration proposed asking if the respondents to the census were citizens, a question that has not been on the census since the 1950s, using the rationale that it would help enforce the Voting Rights Act.

• On June 28, the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling suspended the citizenship question from being used.

• The Administration attempted to re-open the issue and include the question, but the Census Bureau had already begun printing forms.

• Bottom line: No citizenship question will appear on the census, but some still fear that those in some communities will be afraid to participate.

Is Census Data Safe?

• Responses to the 2020 Census are protected under Title 13 of the U.S. Code. Under Title 13 of the U.S. Code, the Census Bureau cannot release any identifiable information about individuals, households, or businesses, even to law enforcement agencies.

• Disclosure of information by a Census Bureau employee comes with a $250,000 penalty and/or up to five years in prison. Census Bureau staff take a lifetime oath to protect the personal information of respondents.

• The law states that the information collected may only be used for statistical purposes and no other purpose.

• Census responses cannot be used against anyone by any government agency or court in any way—not by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), not by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), not by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and not by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The law requires the Census Bureau to keep information confidential and use responses only to produce statistics. There are no exceptions.

• In 2020, there are a variety of ways to respond to the Census, including...
When Does the Census Occur?

“Census Day” is the official kickoff of counting, which is April 1, 2020. However, the Census Bureau will begin to send mail to households in mid-March. Because of the ability to use online technology this year, it may be possible to enter your information mid-March! The online response form will be mobile responsive, so you can respond on your phones. The online and phone response system will be available in 13 languages.

Phase 1: Education and Community Engagement

Join complete count committees
This is being researched to determine what is the most appropriate committee involvement for LWV Seattle-King County. If you are involved in any such committees or would like to be, contact Cathy O'Shea or Melissa Taylor.

Town hall style forums
There were several redistricting forums last year in Seattle and Bellevue to talk about the importance of the Census count and the impact on the redistricting process that follows the Census. This year, a forum would focus on the Census, how it will be done, what people need to do to be counted.

Here is what you can do today and every day. Start to talk about what is on the Census form, when people will be notified, and the impact the Census has on our communities. We’re going to keep you updated on all this
over the next few months so you can share this with friends, family, and others.

**Partnership building**
Leagues cannot be in all communities at all times and partnerships will be important. If you have any connections with the hard-to-count communities (next topic), let us know.

**Hard-to-count communities**
You’ve probably heard “hard to count communities” a million times, but do we all know who these communities are?

- Black males between 18-35.
- Children.
- The homeless.
- Income vulnerable communities.
- English language learners.
- Undocumented immigrants.
- Racial/ethnic minorities.
- Individuals and communities with poor internet connections who will be hard to count because of the movement to a digital form.

*Where are they?*
There is a Hard-to-Count (HTC) map that shows those areas that are most likely to be undercounted due to low response rates. We’ll focus on these more in our local article next month. You can check out local areas on this map: https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/  

**Phase 2: Get Out the Count (GOTC)**
The national coalition is hosting five regional summits across the country on this topic. The summits will cover best practices to encourage the public to GOTC and identify the hard-to-count populations by region. LWVUS will attend these summits and share the information to sharpen our strategy around GOTC so that we are all doing unified work across the country. The summits will wrap by early October. And just a reminder that GOTC phases will launch on Census Day, April 1, 2020, so we hope that the guidance offered will give Leagues plenty of time (four to six months) to start planning for this phase.

Great news, we won’t ask you to go door to door! If you really want to, you can sign up to be a paid Census Enumerator who does go out after April to follow up with households that have not responded.

Here are some activities you will see the League do and we need you to help us make it happen!

- Encourage participation through social media, traditional media, and alternate forms of communication.
- Support the count when it begins with technology partners.
- Help with language assistance and disability assistance.

**Phase 3: Watchdog Reporting**
Because of the power of the Census, both politically and financially, there may be times when the process is not handled as it should be. Being informed about the Census, you may find times when there is inappropriate behavior, such as filling out forms on others’ behalf. So, here is what you can do individually:

- Remain vigilant in your community.
- Look for opportunities to engage your community at every turn, and watch for groups that may be trying to undermine the process.
developed political power through our non-partisan, solid reputation. Through their due diligence and thorough vetting of positions, units have exercised procedural power in building that reputation.

But we need more Units. We need to meet the needs of our diverse population and a changing-of-the-guard age demographic. We need newly minted voters — both young and new citizens; we need your friends and co-workers; we need parents and grandparents; and — we need YOU!

To make this growth work, we must firmly tether ourselves together — through communication, resource sharing and pooling our skills. My goal, with lots of help, is to develop a template, a sort of smorgasbord guide, of what Units already do, can do and how new ones can form. With a clear guide in place, we’ll all feel prepared to change and grow.

The basic framework for all Units fits into four principles:

- **Focused.** We need to be FOCUSED on the Principles that guide the League of Women Voters.
- **Friendly.** We need to be FRIENDLY to one another and include friends of diverse backgrounds as well as make our meetings member-friendly through expanded meeting times and innovative ways to connect.
- **Fired-Up.** We need to be FIRED-UP! We must channel and honor the women who fought for our rights as we protect our democratic principles and preserve the health of democracy itself.
- **Fun.** And it better be FUN! Whether we are meeting or marching — we know how to have FUN!

Now let’s do it — ‘Unit’ed.

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Establish concrete actions you can take in your communities to ensure a full and complete Census. To see what LWVUS is doing, check out their web site at [https://www.lwv.org/league-management/voting-rights-tools/census-action-kit](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/voting-rights-tools/census-action-kit).

Want to Get Involved?

Whether you’ve done statistical analysis, researched your family tree, or follow redistricting changes, the Census is a valuable resource for this country. As it transitions to a more digital process and with the concerns that have arisen out of the citizen question issue, it’s important that we get the right information out to the general population to *Get Out the Count*.

If you want to be involved or are already involved, let us know. You may want to write an article like this one or hold a forum. If you speak another language, you may want to support non-English speakers at a library setting. The plans are being made now and we would love for you to be a part it. Just contact Cathy O’Shea at coshea120@gmail.com or Melissa Taylor at melissataylorlwvskc@gmail.com.

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So, I guess- we have our marching orders!