Census 2020: What’s Happening Locally?

by Cathy O’Shea

The September Voter reviewed the three phases of the LWVUS Action Plan for the Census. We’re now in the Education and Community Engagement Phase. To start learning, let’s talk about who’s doing what in King County to get ready for the Census in April 2020.

Our population has grown 13% since April 2010, when the 2010 Census counted 1,931,249 people living in King County. In the years since, the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) has published annual population estimates for Washington counties and cities; OFM’s 2018 estimate of King County’s population is 2,190,200. This is an increase of 258,951 people—13% growth countywide.

For the same time period, the OFM estimates that the population across Washington State has grown 10%. And along with these population increases have come big changes in income and other demographics of King County residents. Getting a complete and accurate count will be critical to our region for a number of reasons.

Because the Census is a national activity, its operations start at the federal level, then flow through the state and county, and then to city and local operations. Coordination and funding are organized across all these agencies.

Federal Level

On August 12, the United States Census Bureau announced that their employees would begin “Neighborhood Address Canvassing,” walking through neighborhoods in cities across the country to confirm home addresses. Census employees knock on doors and ask questions to verify the address and any additional living spaces on the property for inclusion in the 2020 Census.

State of Washington

Complete Count Committees (CCC) are intended to bring together community leaders to work together for a complete and accurate count of residents in the targeted area. Governor Inslee launched the statewide CCC on October 8, 2018; the committee is chaired by former Governor and former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke. The committee combines the expertise and knowledge of a representative group of local community, business, philanthropic, and elected leaders to strategize about how to:

- Educate Washington residents about the census and its impact in terms of the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and billions of dollars that Washington’s communities receive in federally funded programs;

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- Explain innovations, such as the use of the internet as a primary self-response tool;
- Engender trust in the process despite the invasive nature of a census exercise and the cybersecurity concerns associated with online submissions;
- Encourage and ensure self-response and cooperation with Census workers.

The State has created a Census toolkit for state agencies (see http://bit.ly/WA-censustools). Secretary of State Kim Wyman is planning work on the voter pamphlet for October, which should include several pages about the Census.

King County

The King County CCC has 30 members from a number of organizations:

- Public officials such as Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and King County Executive Dow Constantine;
- Organizations that support hard-to-count (HTC) populations: Entre Hermanos, Eastside Immigrant and Refugee Coalition;
- Humanitarian organizations that support a full count: Gates Foundation, Seattle Foundation;
- Public Agencies that can provide resources: King County Assessor and Library System

In addition to the countywide CCC, there are four other CCCs already formed (East King County; Kenmore; the Seattle Census Task Force discussed below, and South King County).

Seattle

The Seattle Census Task Force is a coalition of local elected officials and community leaders who are organizing Seattle’s preparations for the 2020 Census. The task force advises Mayor Durkan on policy and outreach to historically under-counted communities and will help implement 2020 Census preparations to ensure a complete, informed, and safe count.

Outreach Grants

Much of the current effort is centered on identifying partners who can help to reach hard-to-count (HTC) populations—for example, people experiencing homelessness, racial and ethnic minorities, or undocumented immigrants. The state is funding and awarding $7 million in grants to nonprofits that can help to reach out to these communities.

The Regional Census Fund—established by Seattle Foundation, King County and the City of Seattle—is investing $710,000 through 21 grants to nonprofits serving historically underrepresented communities in Greater Seattle.

Philanthropy Northwest’s Washington Census Equity Fund, a statewide pooled fund of 25 philanthropy partners, announced $800,000 in grants to 28 nonprofits and tribes providing outreach, education and resources to ensure a robust and accurate Census count.

Be a Census Ambassador

If you’re looking to get involved with the Census, an easy place to start is talking to your friends about the upcoming Census. Do you work with a group that serves hard to count groups? Find out what they are doing, are they aware there are grant opportunities to help them? How do you think the League should be helping the Census efforts? Let us know your thoughts at votereditor@seattlelwv.org.