United States Census 2010

It's In Our Hands

2010 Census Constituent FAQs

1. When will the census forms be delivered?

The form package, which will consist of the initial form, a cover letter and a return envelope, will be delivered between March 15 and March 17, 2010, in areas where the United States Postal Service delivers the census forms for the Census Bureau. Census Bureau workers will deliver forms between March 1 and April 30, 2010, in all other areas.

2. Who should fill out the census form?

The head of household should complete the form on behalf of every person living in the residence on April 1, 2010, including relatives and non-relatives. The person filling out the form should include information about all household members (including himself/herself and infants) who live and sleep at the address most of the time. The person also should include people who are staying there on April 1, 2010, who have no permanent place to stay. The Census Bureau is required by the U.S. Constitution to count everyone living in this country, regardless of immigration or citizenship status.

3. What should I do after I get the form?

Fill out the form in blue or black ink and mail it back in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope as soon as possible.

4. What if I lost my return envelope?

If your postage-paid envelope is lost or missing from your package, mail your completed form to:

U.S. Census Bureau
National Processing Center
1201 East 10th Street
Jeffersonville, IN 47132

5. How will the 2010 Census differ from previous censuses?

In 2010, every residence will receive a short form of just 10 questions. More detailed socioeconomic information previously collected through the decennial census will be asked annually of a small percentage of the population through the American Community Survey. To learn more about the American Community Survey, visit www.census.gov/acs.

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Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

6. How are census data used?

Census data determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives. Census data also help determine the allocation of federal funds for community services, such as school lunch programs and senior citizen centers, and new construction, such as highways and hospitals. Every year, the federal government distributes more than $400 billion to local, state and tribal governments based on census data.

7. How does the Census Bureau count people without a permanent residence?

Census Bureau workers undertake extensive operations to take in-person counts of people living in group quarters, such as college dormitories, military barracks, nursing homes and shelters, as well as those who have been displaced by natural disasters.

8. How long will it take to complete the form?

One of the shortest census forms in history, the 2010 Census form asks 10 questions and takes about 10 minutes to complete.

9. What questions are asked on the 2010 Census form?

Four general questions are asked about the household:

- If the housing unit is owned or rented
- Telephone number
- How many people live in the residence
- If any additional people who lived at the residence on April 1, 2010, were not included

And for each household member, we ask:

- Name
- Sex
- Age and date of birth
- Relationship to the person who owns or rents this residence
- Whether this person is of Hispanic origin
- Race
- If this person sometimes lives or stays elsewhere

10. Do I have to respond to the 2010 Census?

Yes, your participation in the 2010 Census is vital and required by law. Title 13 section 221 of the United States Code requires your response. Title 13 also requires that the Census Bureau keep respondents' answers confidential and uses them only for tabulations that do not reveal any personal data about individuals or households.

11. What happens if I don't respond?

Although the law makes it a crime not to answer the decennial census, the American Community Survey and other mandatory censuses, and authorizes the courts to impose a fine of up to $5,000 for failure to respond, the Census Bureau views this approach as a last resort. Rather than emphasizing or seeking the imposition of penalties, we encourage response by explaining the importance of the questions we ask and how the information benefits the community.

12. Can I get paid to complete this form?

No, your participation is required by law.

13. What is the due date for returning the form?

Households should complete and mail back their forms upon receipt. Ideally, all forms will be returned by Census Day on April 1, 2010. Census workers will visit households that do not return forms to take a count in person.

14. Can I respond on the Internet?

No, this option is not available. Please complete and mail back your census form so we can get a complete and accurate count in 2010.

15. What type of assistance is available to help people complete the form?

2010 Census form language assistance guides are available in at least 59 languages. Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) also will assist those unable to read or understand the form. A Teletext Device for the Deaf (TDD) program will help the hearing impaired. Contact your Regional Census Center for more details about the types of assistance available and for QAC locations.

16. Why do you want our names?

We request names for the following reasons:

- To help ensure people are not counted twice in the census.
- To help eliminate simple errors like counting "Mary Jones" as a male.

- To allow you, and only you, to obtain a record from the Census Bureau at a later time if necessary for proving age, citizenship or family relationship. Some people need this information to qualify for Social Security benefits, to obtain passports and to have official proof for other purposes.

Although names are requested, the Census Bureau treats names the same as other census information provided — it is protected by law and strictly confidential. Information collected is used for statistical purposes only; the Census Bureau cannot publish or release information that would identify you or your household.

17. Why do you need my telephone number?

We may need to clarify your form responses. If we have a telephone number, we may be able to do this without having to send a census worker to your home. Your telephone number is kept confidential, as are all your responses.

18. Why does the Census Bureau ask about race and Hispanic origin?

The Census Bureau collects race data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and these data are based on self-identification. The racial categories included in the census form generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country, and are not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or socio-cultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as "American Indian and White." People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino or Spanish may be of any race. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include both racial and national origin or socio-cultural groups. You may choose more than one race category.

Information on race is required for many federal programs and is critical in making policy decisions, particularly for civil rights. States use these data to meet legislative redistricting principles. Race data also are used to promote equal employment opportunities and to assess racial disparities in health and environmental risks.

19. Why doesn't the race question include more categories?

The race categories are those that are approved for data collection purposes by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. For more information, visit the Office of Management and Budget Web site at: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/1997standards.html.

20. Why does the census form have room for only six people?

The Census Bureau decided to use a six-person form for the 2010 Census based on extensive research that indicated that most households contain six or fewer people. Given the small number of households with seven or more people, it is less expensive for the Census Bureau to follow up with those households than it is to produce, print and mail a form with space for seven or more people.

21. Do we count Americans living abroad?

Yes, in some cases. The 2010 Census counts will include federal employees (military and civilian) and their dependents living overseas with them that can be assigned to a home state.

These data are provided to the Census Bureau by the employing federal departments and agencies through their administrative records. However, private U.S. citizens living abroad who are not affiliated with the federal government (either as employees or their dependents) will not be included in the overseas counts. These overseas counts are used solely for reapportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

22. What if this address is not a residence or home?

If there is an apartment, mobile home, room or group of rooms where people live or stay at this address, then a household member who is at least 15 years of age can fill out and return the form by mail in the postage-paid envelope provided. If the address is nonresidential or if people do not live or stay at that address, then do not complete the form. A census worker will visit the address to verify that it is nonresidential and remove the address from the master address list. If you receive additional letters or forms in the mail, simply ignore them.

23. What if the housing unit at the address is vacant on Census Day?

If the housing unit is vacant on Census Day, then do not complete the form. A census worker will visit the address and collect information from a knowledgeable respondent on the status of the unit. If you receive additional letters or forms in the mail, simply ignore them.

24. We are all visitors at this address. Should we fill out the form?

No, include only those people who live or stay there most of the time. But if you have no other permanent place to stay, you should fill out the form. If no one lives there most of the time, then enter a zero in question one for the number of people. Do not mark any other items. Please return the form in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

25. I returned my completed form but a census worker still visited my home. Why?

We may not have received your form in time to update the census worker's assignment, or your form may have been delayed or lost in the mail. When this happens, we instruct the census worker to collect your information anyway to remove the risk of not receiving your information.

26. But won't I get counted twice that way?

No, the Census Bureau has procedures to eliminate duplicate forms. There is an ID number associated with each household's form. This prevents us from counting you more than once.

27. Why was I visited multiple times?

Quality checks are used to assure our procedures are working and that staff is doing the job as assigned. These checks require that some households be visited several times.

28. Do I fill out the form if I'm moving out before April 1, 2010, or if the unit will be vacant on April 1, 2010?

No, please do not complete the form. The census counts people where they live on April 1, 2010; look for a form to be delivered to your new address.

29. Why don't you collect the information on the housing unit when you update the address list?

The household information reported must pertain to Census Day, which is April 1, 2010. The address updating operation takes place April 2009 through July 2009, to leave time for processing, updating our address list and mailing the forms.

30. Why did I receive a bilingual form?

We are providing this form in areas where census data suggest there are many Spanish speakers who could benefit from receiving a form in Spanish as well as English. We believe this will help respondents complete the form with limited assistance from the Census Bureau.

31. How do I make corrections on the form?

If the error is in a write-in box, carefully draw a line through the incorrect entry and write the correct information as close as possible to the entry you lined through. This way, the person who reviews your form will know what you intended. If you checked the wrong box, just draw a line through it and mark the correct box for the question.

32. Is information shared with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Internal Revenue Service, courts or the police?

No, individual census records are not shared with anyone, including government agencies or private organizations. It is against the law for the Census Bureau to give personally identifiable information about an individual to any other individual or agency until 72 years after it is collected for the decennial census. After 72 years, the individual census records are sent to the National Archives where they are made public primarily for genealogical research.

33. What are "Be Counted" forms?

Be Counted forms are census forms that are available at various community locations for use by people who either did not receive a census form in the mail or who believe they were not otherwise included on any other census form. Be Counted forms will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian. The form should be picked up and mailed back in the attached postage-paid envelope. The deadline for mailing a Be Counted form is May 1, 2010.

34. Why does the Census Bureau send out so many mailings?

We find that this is cost effective overall. Getting households to return their form on time is the key factor for conducting a successful census. When people do not return their forms by mail, we must send a census worker to their household to obtain their answers. Many times this requires multiple visits, which can be very expensive.

The Census Bureau estimates for each percentage point of the population that does not return a form during the 2010 Census, it will cost approximately $80-90 million to have census workers make personal visits to obtain the missing information. Conversely, if the mail-return rate increases, then the non-response follow-up workload will decrease, reducing the cost of the census by approximately $80-90 million for each percentage point of reduction. On the other hand, if the mail-return rate decreases, then the non-response follow-up workload will increase, costing an additional $80-90 million for each percentage point of increase.

Our "multiple contact" mailing strategy was developed to get the highest mail-return rate possible. Our studies have shown that mailing a letter telling you that a form is on the way and, after the forms have been mailed out, sending a postcard reminding you to respond increases the mail-return rate. We have found that the second mailing, or replacement mailing, increases the rate of mail return by about 7 percent to 10 percent and eliminates the need to send census workers to many homes, thereby saving millions of taxpayer dollars.

35. I've heard talk about the American Community Survey. What is it and why are you conducting it?

The American Community Survey is part of the Decennial Census Program. While the 10-year census counts the number of people who live in the United States, the American Community Survey shows how people live — our education, housing, jobs and more.

The American Community Survey asks essentially the same questions that used to be on the long form of the census, except it is conducted throughout the year and throughout the decade. This allows the Census Bureau to produce new data every year, instead of only once every 10 years. So, while the old "long form" was a once-a-decade snapshot of an area — one that grew increasingly faded with age — the American Community Survey takes a new picture every year, creating a year-by-year look at how the area is changing.

In Puerto Rico, the American Community Survey is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey.

For additional information about the American Community Survey, visit www.census.gov/acs.

36. Why did I receive a form for both the 2010 Census and a form for the American Community Survey?

Every household in the country will receive a 2010 Census form so that we can provide an official count of the entire U.S. population to Congress. However, your address happens also to be a part of the sample of addresses the American Community Survey is surveying.

Both the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey are vitally important to ensure your community receives government funding for education, transportation, neighborhood improvements and much more. Please fill out and mail back your 2010 Census form and your American Community Survey form. Your participation in each also is required by law.

37. When will data from the census be available?

The population counts will be delivered to the President of the United States within nine months of Census Day (on or before Dec. 31, 2010), as required by law. This report will show the apportionment population counts by state, and the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives apportioned to each state.

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Public Law (P.L.) 94-171 requires the Census Bureau to provide only counts of the total population for a variety of geographic areas to be used for the redistricting process. In addition, other data items, such as race, ethnicity, voting age and housing unit tallies, are included in this data set. P.L.94-171 also requires these data be delivered to each state no later than April 1, 2011.

Other data products such as demographic profiles, summary files of aggregated data and reports will be released on a flow basis from April 2011 through September 2013.

More detailed population and housing information is available annually from the American Community Survey. Visit www.census.gov/acs for more information.

A more complete database of questions and answers is available on 2010census.gov.

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