

How Nonprofits Can Ensure an Accurate Census Count:

Encourage States to Waive Income Limits for Temporary Census Workers

Encouraging States to Disregard Census Income When Determining Eligibility for Public Benefits

Every person counted in the 2020 Census means more resources for your state. However, the census historically undercounts low-income communities, immigrants, and communities of color. Undercounts not only place additional burdens on already cash-strapped nonprofits, they leave the hard to count communities without accurate political representation and under resourced by those programs that are funded based on formulas. Nonprofits can play many roles to help ensure an accurate count, including seeking to change rules to encourage the hiring of low-income individuals to work within their community.

Census Bureau To Hire 400,000 Temporary Workers To Reach Hard to Count Communities

For the first time in 2020, many communities will be asked to complete the census questionnaire online. However, the US Census Bureau estimates it will still need to hire almost half a million temporary workers — enumerators — to go door to door for those residents who do not complete the census online, often referred to as “hard to count community members.”

How Income Waivers Help Your State Reach Hard to Count Community Members

Research from past advocacy campaigns demonstrates that residents are more responsive to answer the door for people from within their community. However, members of the hard to count community are often ineligible to work even temporarily as census enumerators without losing their public assistance (SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, or CHIP). To help recruit census workers from within these hard to count communities, the federal government will permit states to opt into a waiver process. States that participate will be able to waive or disregard the temporary census income from the eligibility limits for certain types of assistance programs. This will ensure that the additional income from the census work does not cause temporary workers to lose access to federal assistance programs.

These waivers encourage members of hard-to-count communities to become census enumerators and thus help ensure a fair and complete count.

How Nonprofits Can Encourage States to Opt Into the Waiver Process

Each state agency that administers TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, or CHIP must elect to opt into the waiver process no later than December 2019 in order to protect temporary census workers from

losing federal assistance. Nonprofits have critical relationships with policymakers and CAN encourage states to opt into the waiver process. [View](#) which states have not yet opted into the waiver process.

501(c)(3) public charities are excellent organizations to encourage states to waive income limits because they are leaders within their communities and speak on behalf of the people being counted. A public charity can take this cause on like any other, bearing in mind state and federal rules on lobbying and election-related activity.

If you have a question on the census waiver process that isn't answered here, contact Common Cause's Keshia Morris at kmorris@commoncause.org.

WHEN ENCOURAGING STATE AGENCIES TO OPT INTO THE CENSUS INCOME WAIVER PROCESS, DO:

- Have your Executive Director call or write the state officials that administer Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and TANF in your state and ask them to opt into the income waiver process.¹
- Have your board members call or write the state officials about the income waiver process.
- Develop a call script and host a phone bank to call elected officials about the income waiver process.
- Develop a sample letter for members of the community to send to elected and appointed officials about the income waiver process.
- Use social media to communicate directly with elected officials about the income waiver process.
- Use social media to mobilize members of the public to contact their state officials about the income waiver process.
- Thank state, elected, and appointed officials for participating in the income waiver process to ensure an accurate census count for your community.²

WHEN ENCOURAGING STATE AGENCIES TO OPT INTO THE CENSUS INCOME WAIVER PROCESS, DON'T:

- Ask candidates whether, if elected, they will promise to opt into the income waiver process (Candidate pledges are not 501(c)(3) permissible).
- Praise or criticize candidates who comment on the waiver process (Endorsements of candidates are not 501(c)(3) permissible).
- Use federal funds to influence the income waiver process.

Notes

- 1 For IRS purposes, asking executive officials to take official action is generally not considered lobbying (unless the action involves formulating legislation). However, for state law purposes, some states consider certain attempts to influence executive branch action to be lobbying for purposes of having to register as a state lobbyist. Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy project maintains a library of many states' lobbying laws [here](#).
- 2 501(c)(3) organizations cannot praise or criticize candidates, but they might be able to praise or criticize elected officials for their official actions provided they follow the rules discussed [here](#).



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Founded in 1979, Alliance for Justice is a national alliance of more than 130 organizations dedicated to advancing justice and democracy. AFJ created the Bolder Advocacy program to demystify the rules surrounding advocacy and promote more active engagement in the democratic process by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to advocate effectively within the limits of the law.