

## Time to Refocus on the 2020 Census

County governments have been working diligently to address a myriad of issues related to the COVID 19 pandemic. As a result, outreach efforts planned for the 2020 Census in March and April fell to the wayside and census response rates are much lower than they should be. Georgia is currently ranked 34<sup>th</sup> nationally for response rates at 52.9%, which is 3.7% below the national average of 56.6%. Only 59 counties (37%) have passed the 50% threshold and fifteen counties have response rates of below 30%. While these statistics are discouraging, there is still time to increase response rates in your county if you act now.

### Changes to Census Operations and Timelines

Not only has COVID 19 impacted state and local governments, but it has also impeded federal government operations. As such, the Census Bureau had to make several adjustments to collection and field operation schedules for the 2020 Census. In revitalizing your county's census campaigns, it is important to know how these changes will impact your plans. The Census Bureau has outlined all changes to their operational schedules at [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov).

Operation	Planned Schedule	Revised Schedule
Self Response	March 12-July 31	March-October 31
Group Quarters	April 2-June 5	April 2-September 3
Field Operations	March 1	Starting May 4 in some areas
Non Response Follow Up	May 13-July 31	August 11-October 31
Homeless	April 1	Still Evaluating
Transitory Locations	April 9-May 4	September 3-September 28
Mobile Questionnaire Assistance	March 30-July 31	Still Evaluating

### Outreach Strategies

As the elderly and medically fragile continue to shelter in place and everyone else is encouraged to stay at home as much as possible and practice social distancing, the best outreach at this time is social media and virtual meetings. From posting census facts on social media to hosting virtual town hall meetings, there are a number of ways to reach the public without in-person interactions.

- Promote census coloring pages that are available online to kids
- Use or develop a 2020 Census hashtag for your county and encourage its use
- Create an "I Count" selfie campaign to encourage residents to post photos after completing the census
- Include a 2020 Census tagline for emails used by county staff and encourage other organizations within the county to do the same (nonprofits, chambers of commerce, local businesses, cities)
- Ask local media to help generate interest and provide information about the census
- Include census information and presentations in county meetings
- Inform the public how to track [response rates](#) and [rankings](#) for counties and consistently promote the status of your county

- Utilize videos on your county's website, social media, and public access channels that are freely available through the Census Bureau's YouTube Channel, [census.ga.gov](https://www.census.gov), and [www.everyonecountsga.org](http://www.everyonecountsga.org).
- Challenge other counties and cities to a response rate competition to drive up participation

### **Emphasize Why the Census is Important**

People need to know why it is worth their time to complete the census and the types of benefits that they or their community may receive. As such, it is very important to emphasize how this data is used and the local benefits.

Census data is used to distribute federal funding to states and local governments. It is also used to determine congressional representation, redistricting for federal, state, and local districts, community planning, program and grant eligibility, local tax distributions, and business relocation and expansion decisions, among other uses.

Census data benefits communities in various ways. One person in Georgia is estimated to be worth \$2300<sup>i</sup> in federal funding per year. Over 55 federal programs use census data to fund services that can directly impact your community such as school lunches, Medicaid, rural assistance, food banks, SNAP, WIC, and housing assistance. It can also be used for local planning purposes such as determining the number of schools, recreation facilities, or senior housing needed.

It is also beneficial to show residents how census data is used as it relates to COVID 19. Census data is used to fund food banks, provide funding to hospitals, and may be used in formulas to distribute federal disaster funding to local governments. Tying census data to a real time situation that impacts everyone is a great way to showcase the importance and need to participate.

For additional ideas and information on census marketing and outreach, visit the [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov).

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<sup>i</sup> Based on the distributions for the 55 largest federal programs in Georgia as of FY 2016. *Counting for Dollars 2020: Georgia*, GW Institute of Public Policy, Andrew Reamer and Sean Moulton, January 30, 2019.