

WE COUNT LA “HOW TO” SERIES

How To: Talk About the Census

The Do’s and Dont’s

Below are guidelines for communicating about the census, especially to hard-to-reach populations who may be wary of filling out the survey. Please note that these are not talking points, but rather, guidelines for *how* to talk about the census.

Do...

- **Focus on the “why” and personalize.** Make the case as to why the census matters to the people you’re speaking to — whether it’s how much money goes to the school their child attends, how much their neighborhoods should get to fix roads, or how much money should be used to help them see a doctor and get medical care. Identify and communicate the benefits that apply to their everyday lives.
- **Make it safe.** Address people's fears about privacy, documentation status, etc. Remind them that their information is protected by federal law and cannot be shared with anyone, including other government agencies or the courts.
- **Provide an easy-to-understand breakdown of what the Census actually is.** Paint a picture to build knowledge. Explain how it has been used now and in the past to influence important decisions. An analogy you can use is planning a birthday party. The more information about who is attending, the better party you can plan for. On the other hand, without the right information, there won’t be enough cake or drinks for everyone. Census information is used in a similar way, but with much more serious consequences.
- **Empower communities and demonstrate how the census gives people a voice and affirm their presence in the U.S.** Frame participating in the Census as standing up for their children, their friends, and themselves. Depending on the audience, it might be useful to explain how it is a form of resistance against those who are working hard to silence their voices and deny their votes. Obviously among some audiences, this messaging could backfire. You know your constituents better than anyone, so use your best judgement before you pursue this line of argument.
- **Explain it is easy and convenient to fill out.** Explain that there are 10 simple questions that can be filled out using a mobile phone, computer or tablet. Communicate that assistance is available.

Don’t...

- Focus on the government’s power or how it benefits the government. Don't frame the census as a government-mandated requirement rather than a process to benefit communities.
- Use language that is not person-centered.
- Brush off people's fears about safety and privacy.
- Use too much technical language.
- Assume everyone has the ability to fill out the census on their own.