Making Dollars Count: Philanthropy and the 2020 Census

Census 2020 has been in the spotlight this year. The census can at times be controversial, because it’s more than a dataset. It defines what we call ourselves, how we see ourselves, and how we’re represented. It defines our story, as Americans, and serves as a pillar of our democracy. The founders included the mandatory headcount in our constitution to empower the governed, granting us representation and resources based on the population of our communities—a bold new idea, separating this newly formed nation from previous rule.

LVCF is taking a leadership role in the Lehigh Valley to invest staff-time, resources, and funding to ensure every person is counted in the Census 2020. We understand that funding and government representation is at stake for our communities. Moreover, we know the impact that a potential undercount in the census will have on our main partners in this work—philanthropists and nonprofits.

So what exactly is at stake?

In Pennsylvania, we receive $39 billion dollars each year from census-derived data to support federal programs ranging from investments in infrastructure and technology to supporting healthcare and education. In 2010, there were many areas of the Lehigh Valley in which 30% or more of a census tract did not respond to the census. An undercount of the estimated 670,000 Lehigh Valley residents puts federal funding at risk, while also decreasing the amount of representation our community has in government. Current census predictions show Pennsylvania losing one congressional seat after the 2020 census. Unfortunately, there is increased national risk of an inaccurate count due to underfunding of the census bureau, the launch of a new online platform, and an atmosphere of polarization.

Why should you care?

An undercount will increase the demands placed on the area’s nonprofits and the philanthropic community to try to fill the gap of decreased federal funds and services. We can do more with our philanthropic resources when we and the government have

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accurate census data. Nonprofits can do more to serve their missions without the disruption of federal program funding for their many constituents. Instead of needing to make up that gap, we are proactively funding efforts and investing resources to ensure a complete and accurate count. We must tell an accurate story of the Lehigh Valley’s growth, resilience, and prosperity, but this relies on each of us participating in our democracy—just as the founder’s had intended.

**LVCF Civic Engagement: Census 2020 Initiative**

To ensure the Lehigh Valley has an accurate count, the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation has launched a Civic Engagement: Census 2020 initiative, and established the Census Equity Fund. LVCF will support efforts through the following activities:

**Fund & Train**

- Funding key organizations that serve historically undercounted communities in Lehigh and Northampton counties
- Supporting projects that will build awareness about the importance of the Census and increase community’s participation in the count
- Providing organizations with technical assistance and training

**Champion & Partner**

- Co-chairing a regional complete count committee (CCC) with the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, and staff are represented on five regional CCCs
- Partnering with the region’s nonprofit, business, and government stakeholders

**Promote & Drive Action**

- Planning several events and initiatives to build awareness in partnership with other organizations throughout the region
- Reaching at-risk areas through media campaigns
- Building awareness through events for nonprofits and area philanthropists

**Join Us | On-site Nonprofit Visit - September 26 - 9:30-10:30 a.m.**

Contact Erika Riddle Petrozelli if you would like to join us as we visit the Project of Easton to take a tour and learn about their system of education support services to help clients break the cycle of poverty. (erika@lvfoundation.org)