



KANSAS COUNTS

Kansas Counts is a statewide effort aimed at increasing engagement, awareness, and participation in the 2020 Census.



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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Census Impact in Your Community

We frequently hear how important it is we participate in the Census, but many of us do not know why? What could answering 5-10 questions possibly do for me? What could *my* answers inform? Well, when it comes down to it, our answers significantly impact our communities whether it is through funding allocation or disaster relief.

Funding allocation is one of the most significant outcomes of Census results, not only from the federal government, but also how state and local communities make funding decisions and ensure programs are serving the intended populations. An example of this comes from King County, Washington where there is a crisis of housing affordability, especially for low-income senior citizens, the disabled, and disabled veterans.ⁱ To combat this challenge, the state provides a property tax exemption for homeowners over the age of 61 who are on fixed or low incomes.ⁱⁱ However, John Wilson, the county assessor notes that they thought enrollment in the program was low, but they did not have the numbers to inform this guess. Wilson states he turned to the 2017 Census American Community Survey (ACS) to identify how many potential applicants were in King County and where they might be located.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even though the Census removes identifying information, the ACS survey that Wilson used shows the population and housing characteristics of the people in the county. After sifting through the 2017 Census data, Wilson found there were 40,000 households eligible for tax exemption; however, only 15,000 were actually enrolled in the program.^{iv} This finding supported the theory there was a low enrollment and this was perhaps contributing to the severity of the affordable housing crisis in the county. With the household characteristics data, Wilson and his team created an outreach program which would reach into certain neighborhoods with large numbers of lower-income homeowners.^v The aim here was to increase the number of homeowners applying for the program and spread awareness of the tax exemption. By using this Census data, King County was able to gather quantitative facts, create a plan based on the data, and bring in 7,500 new applications.

Further importance of the Census comes from the simplest description of the survey itself, counting who lives where; specifically, for the purpose of disaster relief. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) tailors their efforts to people, homes, and businesses based on Census data. A recent example is Hurricane Harvey in 2017 affecting 20 million people living in Texas and Louisiana. Having the information showing 86% of the population in the zip code 77011 (east of Houston) speak Spanish assists emergency management when determining which specific resources to deploy and how to staff emergency areas.^{vi} Another example from Hurricane Harvey is using average year homes were built to determine which homes may be vulnerable to storms. These are just two examples of how a local, state and federal agencies use Census data to inform its operations.

The Census data makes impacts in our lives stretching beyond these two examples. The data gathered can inform a community if a new school is necessary, how infrastructure could ease transit, and what economic development

opportunities our communities should explore. There are endless ways for the Census to use its plethora of information to help our public officials better understand our community needs.

While it may feel that our individual responses are not relevant, each response tells a part of the story that makes up our communities. It is critical everyone respond to the 2020 Census in order to determine what our communities need in funding, as well as our demographic makeup in case of emergency. There are many more ways in which the Census fuels our longevity and livability as a country, but please consider how your response informs the characteristics of your community.

ⁱ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2019/2020-helps-communities.html>

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