**Outreach Possibilities for**

**Census 2020**

## July 30, 2017

Prior to the 2010 Census, the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) took on an ambitious project: to impel nonprofit organizations throughout the state, especially in Michigan’s cities, to promote awareness about the Census in their communities. Data Driven Detroit (D3) sat on the Nonprofit Complete Count Committee, the body convened by the MNA to assist in implementing outreach strategies, and played a key role in the city of Detroit, providing local organizations with information and data as needed. These efforts helped contribute to Michigan obtaining the fifth-highest census participation rate in the country, with 78% of households mailing back their 2010 Census forms.

A few weeks ago, it was announced that the MNA would once again attempt to rally the nonprofits in Michigan to promote census awareness. Designated as the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign, the organization will once again recruit agencies from across the state in order to provide guidance about how to participate in get-out-the-count efforts in their local communities. As such, D3 must once again assess its prospective participation in the local buildup before the 2020 Census, and judge how large of a role it is willing to play. This document will begin with a short discussion of how important an accurate census count is, as well as detail a few reasons why Detroit has been difficult to count. Afterwards, five potential routes D3 could take will be discussed in detail, beginning with the least interactive role and ending with the most.

# Background

The decennial census takes place every 10 years and provides the most accurate estimate of the nation’s population. While never conducted with 100% accuracy, the count provided by the Census Bureau is used to distribute everything from representatives in Congress to federal dollars for highway funding and social programs. Without knowing within a reasonable degree of certainty how many people live in an area, it would be extremely difficult to direct programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Redistricting of Congressional districts also requires a careful count of the population: when deciding how many House of Representatives seats each state should have after the 2010 Census, North Carolina missed out on a 14th seat by just 15,754 residents! The importance of the census cannot be understated; ensuring an accurate count should be a national priority, and D3 has an opportunity to play a critical role.

Historically, there have been several populations that have been harder to count than others. They include minorities, people in poverty, people who are homeless or living in non-traditional homes, immigrants, people who primarily speak a language other than English, and youth. Ironically, these are also the populations that can most benefit from an accurate census count, as they are more likely to receive government services; if an area’s hard-to-count populations are not well accounted for, they may receive a disproportionately low amount of aid, which may be detrimental to their living conditions. Detroit, when compared to the rest of the country, has a relatively large number of hard-to-count populations, due to a large population of minorities, poor, homeless, and foreign language speakers. Additionally, there are concerns with the fact that the 2020 Census will be conducted primarily online. Hard-to-count populations are disproportionately unlikely to have a stable internet connection, which may discourage them from responding to the census. Coupled with the 64% participation rate in Detroit in 2010, there is the potential for a disastrous undercount in 2020. This makes the efforts of organizations like the MNA even more important, as communicating the importance of an accurate census count to the Detroit community may provide a direct benefit to the services that hard-to-count populations use.

# Recommendations

Below are five proposals that we have explored as potential ways that D3 can get involved in preparations for the 2020 Census. Each proposal includes several strategies that could be utilized to accomplish the level of interaction suggested. This list is by no means exhaustive, and it may later be found that a strategy mentioned in one proposal is better utilized under a different proposal. These proposals are meant to be the baseline for further research as the MNA’s goals for census outreach become clearer.

Census Proposal 1

The Census Bureau is attempting to employ significantly more efficient use of data and resources when conducting the 2020 Census. If the bureau is able to operate at increased effectiveness the need for D3 to assist in census preparation may not be as strong. Additionally, the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) has stepped up to be the community leaders for census-related activities in Southeast Michigan. MNA’s decision to fill this role, coupled with possibly more effective bureau collection could mean that there is not significant need for D3 to get involved leading up to 2020.

# Strategies

Not participating in the 2020 Census effort is a strategy within itself, but there are a few different ways D3 could approach this.

## Wait Until Asked

Rather than set a hard rule to do nothing, D3 could decide to stay silent on the issue of the 2020 Census and decide to get involved only if another organization reaches out for assistance. This would minimize the resources D3 has to put in, while still allowing the possibility of helping the census effort if it is truly needed.

## Strict Un-Involvement

D3 could also decide that it does not have the capacity to involve itself with the census efforts and decide not to use any resources on the topic. With other organizations working on preparing for the census, it is possible the effects of not being involved would not be significant.

# Cost/Benefit

Naturally, the cost of not being involved with the census is next to nothing, besides potentially missing out on data that other organizations may have shared. Similarly the primary benefit of this strategy is the lack of cost. D3 could use its resources on potentially more fruitful projects with higher benefit ratios then involvement in the census would have yielded.

D3 should pursue this option if resources are tight, or if there are other projects available that would likely lead to larger benefits then census involvement.

Census Proposal 2

The Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) has recently stepped up to become the community leader regarding awareness and preparation for the 2020 Census in Detroit and Southeast Michigan. For this reason, it may not be necessary for D3 to step into as active of a role as they took during the 2010 Census. It may be sufficient to take a more passive role and contribute on an on call basis.

This passive approach could come in a variety of forms, but at its core could be invaluable in ensuring a smooth and accurate 2020 Census for Detroit. This is especially true as the Census Bureau has highlighted increased use of reliable data as a priority item in being able to carry out the Census within the mandated budget. It is therefore likely the case that many organizations taking active roles regarding the 2020 census effort will require consultation and assistance as they run into difficulties.

# Strategies

There are multiple ways that D3 could engage in a passive approach to the 2020 Census, all of which involve playing a support role rather than spearheading a specific effort. This proposal highlights a few different strategies that could be employed alone, or in tandem with each other.

## Make Initial Contact

A good starting strategy for D3 would be to contact MNA and let them know that D3 has available capacity to assist with select data related problems, but does not wish to get directly involved with the Census effort. D3 may also wish to contact some of the other non-profits that MNA has identified as particularly active in the effort.

## Make an Online Form

D3 should allow individuals and organizations to reach D3 with census requests without significant resources dedicated to outreach. To achieve this, it would be best to develop an online portal where people could submit Census related data questions/problems. This would allow requests to come to D3 in a manner very similar to Ask D3 requests, and could potentially benefit from the same resources, further reducing costs of the census engagement.

## Keep Communication Digital

In order to maintain the passive approach to Census engagement, it is important that D3 keep communication with other organizations primarily digital or over the phone. In addition, D3 should avoid attending meetings and external events that would add significant labor costs to D3’s participation. This will allow the most efficient use of time and resources, further preventing D3 from getting involved with lengthier discussions and maintaining focus on assisting with specific problems.

## Avoid Lengthy Projects

It is critical that in employing this proposal, D3 make a conscience effort to evaluate the requests other organizations make, and ensure they do not evolve into lengthy endeavors. Projects that expand beyond data pulls, demographic maps, knowledge sharing, etc. should be critically examined on a case by case basis to avoid getting involved on a more in-depth level. In general, tasks D3 takes on should not be abstract and should have a clear and obtainable path to a solution.

# Cost/Benefit

Overall this proposal places an emphasis on supporting the efforts of the 2020 Census while keeping costs to an absolute minimum. Keeping communication digital, not seeking out projects, or picking up lengthy assignments make this the option of engagement with the lowest associated costs. However, despite the cost saving approach, the potential benefit to the collection of an accurate census is still quite large.

One of the primary issues reported with the execution of the 2010 Census was the lack of smart uses of administrative and 3rd party data to effectively target hard-to-count populations. The Census Bureau has therefore made smarter use of data a priority item for the 2020 Census, and for this reason many local organizations helping with the census will need data assistance when trying to launch awareness campaigns, especially those that focus on hard-to-count populations.

The Detroit area has a disproportionally high number of hard-to-count populations compared to other major cities and therefore stands to benefit tremendously with increased data sharing and smart uses of data. For example, organizations will likely need help determining specific areas to advertise within, developing statistics to help convince people of the importance of filling out the Census, or finding metrics required to construct hard to count scores at various geographies

The potential drawback of the passive approach is that it relies on other organizations having somewhat specific knowledge on what sort of data work they need assistance with. It may be the case that organizations’ census efforts could stand to benefit significantly from help with data, but they do not recognize the need, leading in turn to the organization using inefficiently high levels of resources.

Overall this option should be utilized if D3 does not have significant capacity to devote to census related activities, but still wishes to make an impact and help in ensuring that Detroit does not face a disproportional undercount.

Census Proposal 3

While the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) is taking the lead on organizing nonprofits to raise awareness for the 2020 Census, there may be some activities that D3 is better designed to accomplish. During the 2010 Census preparation, D3 assisted with local organizations’ data needs, and this will again be a crucial factor in ensuring an accurate census count.

This represents somewhat of an active approach, where D3 does not need to facilitate and organize local nonprofits and organizations, but provide help when necessary and maintain contact with them to ensure the smooth operation of census-related activities. The Census Bureau has recently tabbed reliable data as a priority item in being able to carry out the Census within the mandated budget, and D3 has the unique ability to fulfil this role at the local level. D3 is in a position to work closely with the MNA and local nonprofits to assess local nonprofit needs and to provide data as necessary.

# Strategies

There are multiple ways that D3 could engage in a semi-active approach to the 2020 Census, with a focus on maintaining relations with local nonprofits about their efforts to engage the community about the 2020 Census. This proposal highlights a few different strategies that could be employed alone, or in tandem with each other.

## Maintaining Contact with MNA and Nonprofits

In order to provide community support for the 2020 Census, it is critical for D3 to create and maintain contact with the MNA and local nonprofit organizations. D3 would need to alert the MNA of their intention to assist local organizations when requested and to find out which local groups are taking the lead on 2020 Census operations. D3 would also need to reach out to these organizations regularly to ensure data needs are met.

## Assisting with Local Data Needs

Raising awareness in preparation for the 2020 Census can take on many forms, from ensuring community participation in the census to assessing privacy concerns residents may have about census questions. Not every organization that works with the MNA will have the ability to address these issues, but D3 has access to data that may be of help. Local nonprofits may request information regarding vacant houses to track hard to count populations, where D3 can provide different parcel surveys that have been done in recent years. They may also request information about internet access to target awareness for areas without as much access, which D3 also has data on.

## Fill in the Gaps

The main goal of this strategy is to provide a point of reference for organizations working with the MNA on Census 2020 awareness, with a more localized scope than what the MNA may be able to provide. The MNA will no doubt have resources devoted to the Detroit area of this project, but D3 may be able to provide more area-specific support. As such, D3 would be a useful asset in providing data to organizations that need it, and would ease some of the burden that the MNA would otherwise face.

# Cost/Benefit

Overall, this proposal places D3 into a semi-active role in the MNA’s large-scale project to increase awareness about the 2020 Census. This would cost somewhat more than a less active role, as data requested by community groups may take time to compile and potentially eat into the time allotted for other projects. The benefit, however, may also be greater than a less active role, as providing information directly to nonprofit organizations can increase their ability to promote the census, and contribute to the overall collection of an accurate census.

One of the primary issues reported with the execution of the 2010 Census was the lack of smart uses of administrative and 3rd party data to effectively target hard to count populations. D3 sits in the unique role of being able to provide this data to local organizations that may require it, and by taking a more active role in reaching out to these organizations, being able to assist in awareness campaigns.

With the administration of the 2020 Census being done primarily through the internet, it will be important for nonprofits and census advocacy groups to target populations with less internet access than others, adding to the demographic of hard to count populations. Organizations may wish to advertise and campaign for census awareness in these neighborhoods, and they will need statistics and data on which areas have less internet access to run a successful campaign.

Taking a more active role, however, may also be costlier than a passive role. The time used to fulfill census-related data requests would need to be managed in a way like Ask D3 requests, where if the request takes more than an allotted amount of time, the organization would be charged. This approach would require the creation of a means by which local groups can contact D3 regarding census-related data requests, and an allotted time limit would need to be agreed upon by the D3 team.

This proposal should be utilized if D3 would like to have a significant local impact on the 2020 Census, while still not devoting too much time to census-related activities.

Census Proposal 4

The Government Accountability Office identified internal coordination and communication as one of the biggest and most expensive areas that needed improvement during the 2010 Census. Additionally, the Census Bureau has set improving coordination as a goal for the 2020 Census in order to run things efficiently and keep costs to a minimum. Many of the problems mentioned were related to organization within the Bureau itself, but there were also many examples of community organizations, such as nonprofits, lacking proper coordination, and in many cases overlapping in efforts.

D3 could attempt to minimize the inefficiencies derived from poor coordination by becoming an information hub regarding the 2020 Census effort. This approach would require a not-insignificant amount of resources but is still shy of becoming a central leader in the census effort.

# Strategies

There are a variety of strategies that can be employed to make D3 effective in improving coordination and becoming an information hub. Some of the potential strategies are outlined below and can be utilized individually or in tandem with each other.

## Make a Database of All Census 2020 Efforts

In order to best coordinate efforts amongst the many different organizations involved with the census, D3 should construct a database containing every known organization in Southeast Michigan/ Detroit with some level of involvement or interest in the 2020 census along with what they have done, what they are doing, and what they plan to do regarding assisting census operations.

It is also important that D3 keep track of the specific geographic focus areas of all relevant parties in order to better detect when an overlap is truly happening, and to better determine which organizations stand to benefit the most from increased coordination.

This database can be assembled by first reaching out to the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) who have been spearheading the census effort in Southeast Michigan. They will likely have knowledge of many of the groups involved with the census. From there a snowball effect can be achieved by asking each provided group information on what they are doing in addition to other groups they know of working on census related tasks.

## Make All Information Publicly Available

To maximize the efficiency gains from gathering information on what each organization is doing; D3 should make the data they collect publicly available online in an easily accessible format. This will allow different groups to use the database as a reference before taking on new projects, or when they need to seek assistance from a group doing relevant work.

## Set up an Online Point of Contact

To assist in the efforts of building a database it would be best if D3 set up an online portal where people who are working on census related tasks can fill out a form and submit their work to be included in the database. Additionally, there should be an option for groups/individuals that would like to know more information about a certain group or would like to know if anyone is doing a specific thing to contact D3 for additional information.

## Knowledge Share when Relevant

Simply building a database of census related activity in Southeast Michigan will likely not be enough to maximize the potential gains from increased coordination. Many organizations may choose not to look at the database, or not think about how it could apply to them. For this reason, it will be important for D3 to share information they think other partners could benefit from when they come across it. For example, if D3 gets information that a group just started collecting data on something a different group is trying to find, they should facilitate the exchange of information so as not to have two organizations doing identical work.

# Cost/Benefit

Becoming the information hub for the census in Southeast Michigan would be relatively cost intensive. The majority of the costs would come from the constant outreach required in order to ensure data stays up to date and accessible. There would also be significant costs with preparing the database to be accessible for use online, and updating it as new information comes along. This is especially true because in order to be effective as a coordinating tool the database would have to be updated fairly regularly.

The potential benefits of maintaining this method are significant. Southeast Michigan stands to benefit tremendously from the increased coordination capabilities that would allow census related resources to be used more efficiently. The presence of the database would also allow organizations to more easily identify gaps in census coverage which could lead to a significant increase in counting of hard to count populations, and overall reductions in money spent on census related activities.

There are potential network effects that could come from the increased knowledge sharing if organizations doing similar things better communicate with each other. These network effects will get larger as the number of groups in the database increases, so potential gains in efficiency will continue to grow.

In addition to local network benefits, there is also the potential that becoming an information hub for census related activities in Southeast Michigan could result in external benefits. For example, groups interested in census related activities from other states may wish to use the database to contact relevant organizations or case studies for evaluation purposes, or may wish to use it as a template for their own regions.

Overall this option should be utilized if D3 wants to take an active, albeit resource intensive, role in assisting the 2020 Census efforts but does not want to spearhead the entire operation. Coordination and communication are noted as being one of the most important areas for improvement in 2020 and D3’s effort with this could make large strides in making sure the Southeast Michigan/Detroit region do not get disproportionately undercounted.

Census Proposal 5

Effective community organization is critical to raising awareness about the decennial census. The coordination of the efforts of local nonprofit organizations by statewide Count Campaigns can work to improve community awareness about the importance of the census as well as target historically hard to count populations. The Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) has stepped up to be the leader of the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign for the 2020 Census, but D3 can assist by working side-by-side with the MNA to provide data services to organizations doing census outreach and through conducting its own outreach.

This proposal represents the most active approach D3 could consider in regard to assisting in 2020 Census-related activities. In this role, D3 would organize local nonprofits, provide data to these organizations when requested, host census workshops for these organizations about lack of internet access and hard to count populations, and recruit other nonprofits to work with the MNA.

# Strategies

There are several ways in which D3 could work side-by-side with the MNA in an active approach to the 2020 Census. These strategies will focus on spurring community involvement and a coordination of efforts in the local area. This proposal highlights a few different strategies that could be employed alone, or in tandem with each other.

## Alert MNA and Nonprofits about Desire to be Community Hub

The MNA is going to need assistance in a task so large, and will hopefully be receptive to the coordinating outreach. It is important to reach out to the MNA and tell them of the large role D3 hopes to fill in order to avoid organizational chaos. By contacting the MNA, D3 can also find out what is most important to them in terms of census awareness and how it can best assist the community. After defining the role D3 will play and running it by the MNA, D3 would reach out to local organizations that are a part of the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign and alert them as to the services that D3 can provide in regard to census-related activities.

## Become the Census Community Hub

Organization in such a large-scale project is critical, and D3 has the ability to coordinate the efforts of the various nonprofit organizations that will be working with the MNA on the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign. D3 will become the point of reference for all census-related concerns and questions, and will also take the lead in providing data as needed to the various partner organizations. This may involve setting up an online point of contact where organizations can submit census-related questions, or the establishment of an open census database, where groups can pull data related to hard to count populations and internet access.

## Host Census Workshops

Not every organization that will be a part of the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign has worked on raising census awareness before, and while the MNA will provide workshops on topics related to the census, it is important to consider local conditions when discussing topics such as hard to count populations. As such, D3 can hold census workshops, covering topics ranging from what demographics are hard to count to how the 2020 Census will be distributed. This information will go a long way towards informing the various community organizations involved in raising census awareness about the situations they may face and how to best approach them.

## Recruit Other Nonprofits

Raising awareness about the 2020 Census is not a small task, and the more organizations that are involved, the more people will hear the message. By working side-by-side with the MNA, D3 will have a list of all organizations that are participating in the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign, and will be able to see which areas of the city are underrepresented. A coordinated effort to recruit nonprofits can then be undertaken in order to also raise awareness in those neighborhoods.

# Cost/Benefit

Overall, this proposal places D3 into the role of the local census intermediary, organizing other nonprofits that are working with the MNA on the Michigan Nonprofit Counts Campaign to ensure that awareness about the 2020 Census is raised and that the count that ensues is the most accurate possible. This is the most active role possible, with a significant amount of time and resources dedicated to providing data needs, hosting community events, and communicating with other organizations. The benefit to this method would be a coordinated approach in Detroit to raising census awareness, but this places a large onus on D3 to provide that leadership.

The lack of a coordinated effort in Detroit has the potential to cause of variety of messages about the census to reach very few people. By having a defined leader in the local operation of census awareness, nonprofits involved will be able to ensure that their information is reaching the correct target audience and that the message is appropriate for the concerns of that area.

By providing workshops to nonprofits that are working with D3 to raise census awareness, questions about what populations are hard to count and where gaps in internet access in the are located can be answered, as well as new data concerns aired. These workshops could also make sure that every organization has the information they need to be successful in distributing their message.

Taking this active of a role, however, may put strains on D3. The data requests that can be made may be long and difficult to procure, and the time spent organizing the various nonprofits may cut from time spent on other projects. Without funding to pursue this role, it may not be fiscally possible for D3 to take on this active of a position. The MNA may also have other ideas on how to run census operations in Detroit that will also have to be considered.

This proposal should be utilized if D3 would like to take control of the local 2020 Census awareness campaign, but would require a significant investment of resources and time to pull off.