

Census 2020: Strategic Framework and Plan

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CENSUS 2020: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As mandated by the United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 2), an “actual Enumeration” of the population living in the United States, citizens or noncitizens alike, is required to be conducted every ten years. The next decennial census will be conducted in April 2020, with efforts to promote self-response beginning in March and follow up enumeration through June 2020.

The decennial census is the cornerstone of our democracy, ensuring equitable political representation and fair allocation of resources at all levels of government. In addition, census data informs important decisions made across social and business sectors regarding programs, products, and services. Therefore, ensuring an accurate count in the Census 2020 is essential.

There are several challenges facing the upcoming census. Despite declining self-response rates, the Census Bureau will be required to conduct the Census 2020 at a lower cost per household than in 2010. There will be fewer local offices, less field staff, and the primary strategy for data collection will be via internet (raising concerns about access and information security). The projected self-response rate for Census 2020 is 55% (significantly lower than 63.5% in 2010).¹ The costs to the Census Bureau for Census 2020 operations are underfunded by at least 50 percent compared to the levels found necessary by the Government Accountability Office for the last decennial.² Due to these issues, the Government Accountability Office has rated the Census 2020 at high risk.³

The Census Bureau faces challenges counting certain households and population groups, regardless of budget and staffing. These include recent immigrants, households with limited English proficiency, households with low income, racial/ethnic minorities, children under 5 years old, persons who are disabled, rural residents, renters, and those with unstable or unconventional housing. California has historically been the hardest-to-count state in the nation. In 2016, about 75% of all Californians belonged to one or more groups that tend to be undercounted.

The County of San Mateo is home to many of these hard to count groups⁴:

- 35% of residents are foreign born
- 47% speak a language other than English at home (100+ languages spoken)
- 6% of children are under 5 years old
- 5% of persons have a disability
- 16.6% of residents are at or below the poverty rate⁵

¹ <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20171012/106505/HHRG-115-GO00-Transcript-20171012.pdf>

² <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/management/2017/08/watchdogs-worry-census-2020-headed-for-inaccurate-results-higher-price-tag/>

³ https://www.gao.gov/highrisk/2020_decennial_census/why_did_study

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/sanmateocountycalifornia>

⁵ <http://www.pplic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

In addition, there are new barriers facing the Census 2020 that will require significant efforts to address:

1. **Citizenship Question:** One of the most significant changes to the Census 2020 survey is the reinstatement of a citizenship question, the first time the government has done this since the 1950 Census.⁶ This question is likely to discourage immigrants, who are facing a negative and uncertain climate, from participating.⁷
2. **Distrust & Data Privacy:** There is a widening distrust of government among diverse segments of the population (immigrant and nonimmigrant alike), raising concerns about how census data will be used and whether it will remain confidential.
3. **Online Survey:** Heightening data privacy concerns is the fact that, for the first time, the bulk of census responses are expected to be collected online (approximately only 20% to receive paper version in initial mailings). In addition to security challenges, this poses barriers for vulnerable communities and populations without digital access and computer literacy.

An undercount in the Census 2020 could have significant impact on the State of California and San Mateo County. In 2015, California received almost \$77 billion from the federal government in funding based on the census count. For *each individual* not counted in the Census 2020, California could lose *up to \$1958 per year* of federal funds for the following decade.⁸ The State Legislative Analyst's office has warned that a greater than average undercount could result in California losing a congressional seat.⁹ Therefore, the California 2018 Budget Act allocated \$90.3 million statewide to support Census 2020 in an effort to ensure a full and accurate count.

In addition to congressional apportionment, census data is used to draw boundaries for every level of government in California down to the level of county, city, town, and school districts. If segments of the County are not counted in 2020, their voices and may not be fully considered when making important budget, program and policy decisions. An incomplete count could also hinder the County from receiving a fair and sufficient share of federal funds that support critical programs in education, foster and child care, nutrition, housing, health, and transportation.

There is a lot at stake with the Census 2020. However, there is also a significant opportunity for civic engagement and community building. Everyone in our county, regardless of age or citizenship status, can participate in the census. And all institutions and organizations, regardless of sector or constituency, have a stake in making sure everyone is counted.

This strategic plan outlines the steps the County of San Mateo will take in collaboration and coordination with diverse partners to ensure a complete count in the Census 2020. The plan draws from census experts, State decision-makers, Census Bureau materials, models of

⁶ https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1950_population_questionnaire.pdf

⁷ Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, [Citizenship Question Non Response](#).

⁸ George Washington University, [Counting for Dollars 2020](#).

⁹ <http://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3780>

complete county best practices, findings from non-census outreach campaigns, local stakeholder input, as well as past experiences from Census Coordinators. The County is positioned to lead and execute the plan, setting a strong foundation for the most complete count possible.

CENSUS 2020 COMPLETE COUNT STRATEGY

Goals and Outcomes

In the 2010 Census, the County of San Mateo had a 75% self-response rate.

The goal for the Census 2020 is to achieve the same or higher self-response rate, despite the additional challenges faced by a hard-to-count population and the current political climate. Maintaining a high response rate is especially critical, since the Census Bureau is expected to face significant challenges in recruiting well qualified enumerators as well as reduced budget for non-response follow up.

The upcoming Census will also be used as an opportunity to contribute to important long-term outcomes that support the County's Shared Vision 2025:

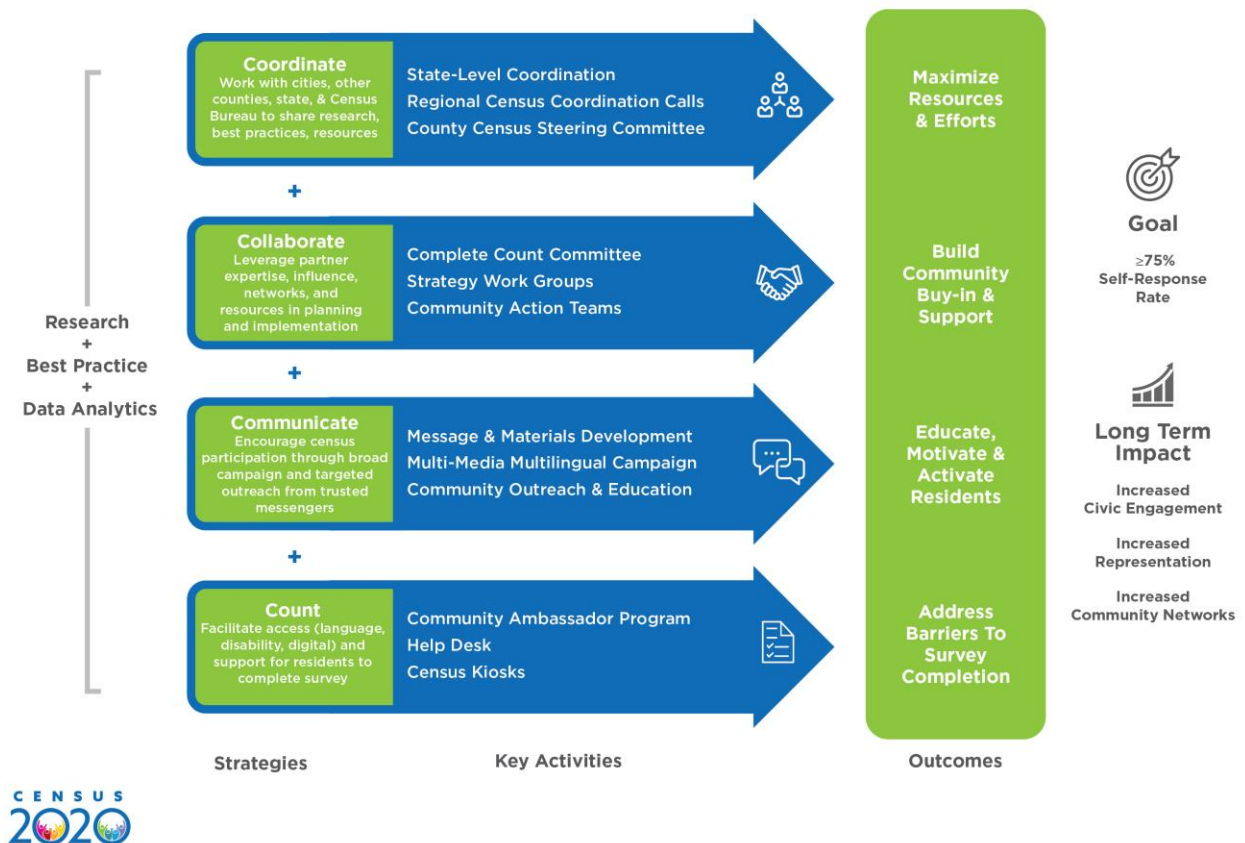
1. Increased civic engagement of residents
2. Increased representation of vulnerable communities
3. Strengthened county-wide networks for ongoing coordination and outreach

Strategic Framework

In addition to the Census Bureau, there are many stakeholders across sectors and levels that are working to ensure an accurate Census 2020 count. Learning from and coordinating with these efforts, the County will implement a comprehensive communication campaign to promote the Census 2020 as well as create a collaborative structure that leverages community strengths, promotes collective action, and supports the participation of all residents. All efforts will be grounded in research, guided by best practice, and driven by cutting edge data analytics to ensure that efforts are targeted, impactful, and cost-effective.

The graphic below presents a snapshot of this framework, followed by details of key activities and outcomes for each strategic component.

Strategic Framework



Strategy 1: Coordinate with cities, other counties, state, and Census Bureau to share information and best practices as well as maximize resources and efforts.

The Census Bureau invests considerable resources in public education and outreach. This includes conducting communication research, testing response strategies, developing messaging and materials in multiple languages, and implementing a broad campaign to promote participation through media, outreach, and partnerships. The County will draw from all of this and complement (rather than duplicate) the efforts of the Census Bureau.

The State is also taking significant steps to ensure a complete count in California. This includes guidance on how to address challenges, research on best practices to promote participation, and allocation of \$90.3 million dollars to support local outreach across the state. The County will continue to participate in state-wide convenings and engage regularly with the CA Complete Count Office to ensure bi-directional communication and coordination. Once outreach begins, the County and its local partners will track efforts on the ground through the Statewide Outreach and Rapid Deployment (SwORD) mapping tool to avoid duplication and provide real-time monitoring of progress.

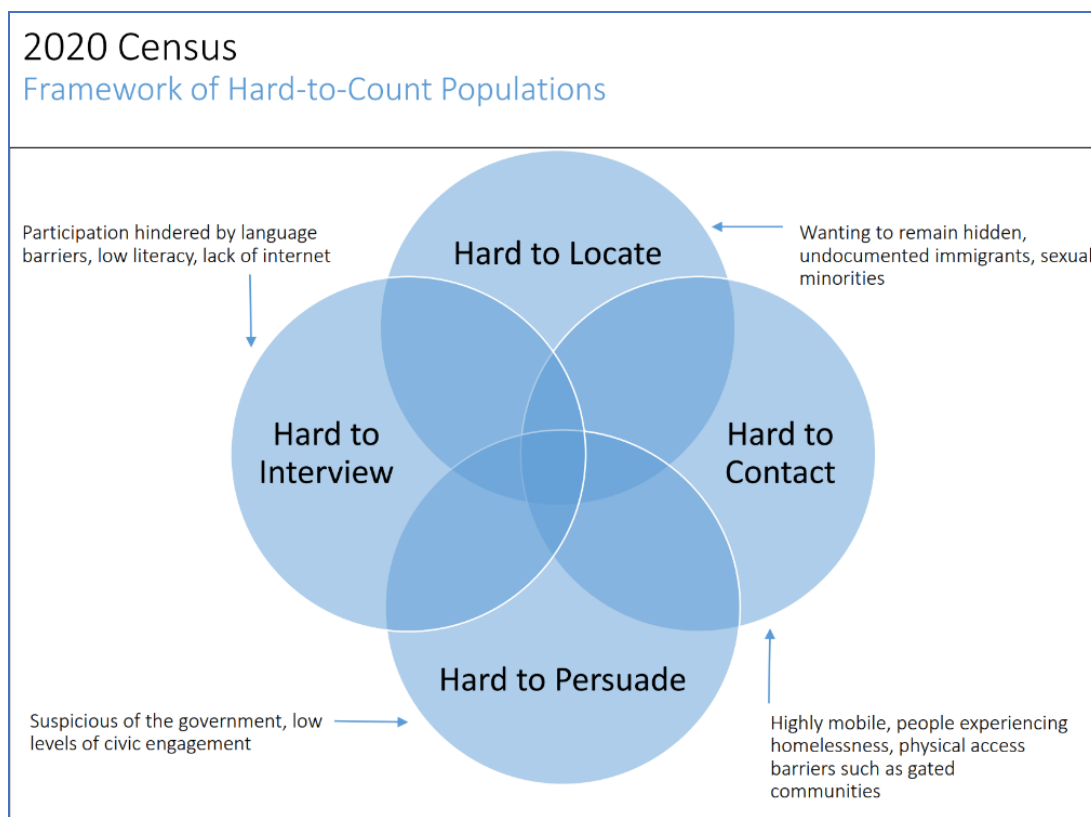
In addition to the State, many counties across California are forming local Complete Count Committees and allocating resources for Census 2020 outreach efforts. The County will continue to lead a bi-weekly call to facilitate sharing of information, best practices, and ideas. In addition, the County will work closely with other counties in our region to maximize resources (coordinated media buys, multi-county events) and ensure consistent messaging and information.

Within the County, a Census Steering Committee will be formed consisting of representatives from each district, priority areas, and departments with direct access to hard to count residents. The County Census Steering Committee, led by the County Manager (or his designee), will meet regularly to provide guidance and support for county-wide efforts. The County will serve as the coordinating body for the cities, providing regular updates to city officials along with messaging and materials for dissemination.

Strategy 2: Collaborate with trusted institutions and organizations across sectors to build broad community buy in and leverage community resources.

While the County is a trusted source of programs and services for many residents, the unique challenges facing the Census 2020 will require community-wide support and action.

The Census Bureau categorizes the Hard-to-Count population into four segments¹⁰:

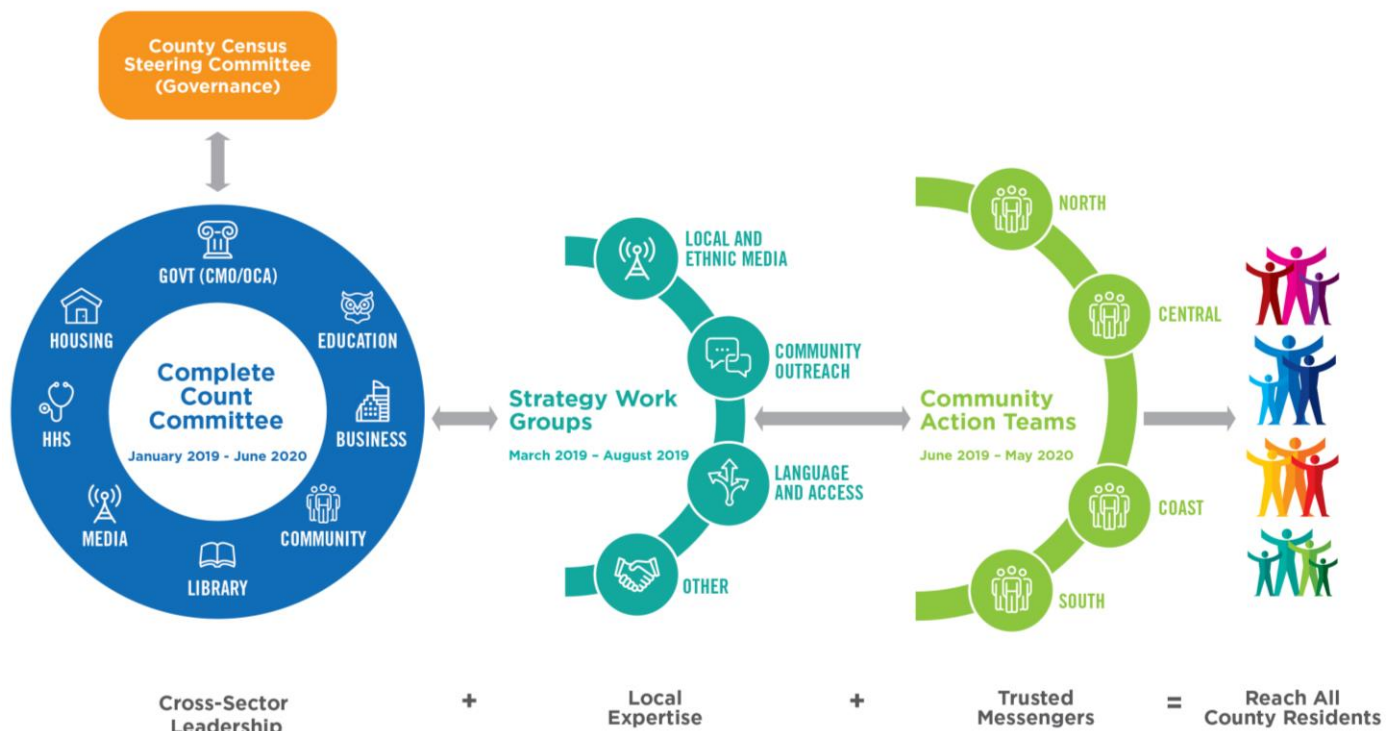


¹⁰ <https://www2.census.gov/cac/sac/meetings/2018-09/reaching-hard-to-count-populations.pdf>

Many County residents fall into these categories. Those that are hard to locate and hard to persuade (immigrants, minorities, and others who are suspicious of the government) will be very reluctant to provide personal information to the Census Bureau. It will take considerable effort by multiple trusted sources to convince these residents to participate in the census. Those that are hard to contact (ex. housing unstable, residents with PO Boxes) will need to be reached through point of service and other community programs. Those that are hard to interview will need specialized outreach and access support.

In response, the County will create a local Complete Count Committee structure that integrates community leaders across sectors, population segments, and localities to jointly develop and implement effective outreach strategies while maximizing resources. The County Manager's Office of Community Affairs will manage and support the County Census Steering and Complete Count Committees to ensure coordination and bi-directional communication across sectors.

Collaborative Structure



The Complete Count Committee (CCC) will include stakeholders across health, human services, education, housing, media, business, and community sectors to provide leadership and support for county-wide Census 2020 efforts. Membership will reflect diversity in population segments served, including age, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and language. The CCC will launch in January 2019 and meet monthly until June 2020.

Members of the CCC will lead the formation of Strategy Work Groups to include experts in access, media, community outreach, and other areas that the CCC chooses to focus on (such as recruitment of enumerators). These work groups will meet bi-monthly from March - August 2019 to craft local strategies, messaging, and toolkits to promote census participation.

Beginning in June 2019, Community Action Teams for each County area will be formed to implement census promotion strategies. These teams will be led by community-based organizations with local knowledge and expertise in engaging diverse segments of the resident population. They will meet bi-monthly through May 2020 and provide regular updates to the CCC.

Key Milestones



Strategy 3: Implement a comprehensive communication campaign to encourage all county residents to complete the census.

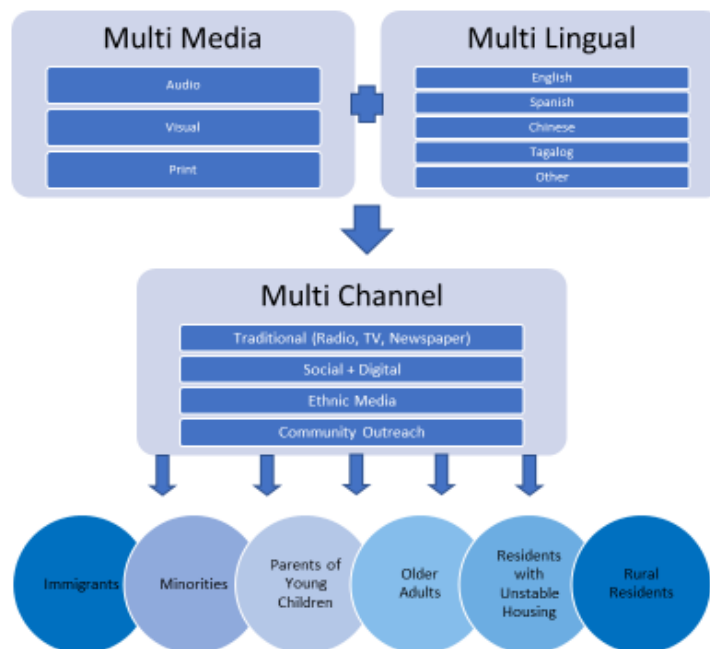
There is generally low understanding of the purpose and importance of the decennial census. Media attention surrounding the citizenship question, while raising awareness about the Census 2020, has likely raised fears, questions, and misinformation. Addressing these will require careful and comprehensive effort.

The fears and concerns residents have about sharing personal information with the federal government are real and must be acknowledged. While Census privacy laws are in place, there is no guarantee of data security. Residents will need to be educated and convinced that the benefits of participating in the Census outweigh the possible risks. This can only be done through trusted messengers who are equipped with clear relevant information and are able to effectively address questions/concerns.

There is no one trusted source of information for any population segment. While certain messengers may be more influential than others, most residents will need to hear information numerous times before it is digested and considered. And even if residents are motivated to participate, they may have questions about how and when to participate.

The County will lead the development of a comprehensive communication strategy, based on research, best practice, and data analytics. Information regarding Census 2020 will be disseminated in various formats and languages via media (traditional, ethnic, social and digital) as well as through community outreach (events, point of service, canvassing). The Complete Count Committee structure will ensure that communication regarding the Census 2020 will be consistent yet tailored across sectors, population segments, and localities.

Comprehensive Communication Campaign



Strategy 4: Support residents in completing the census survey, including facilitate language, disability, and digital access.

While the largest hurdle will be motivating residents to participate in the Census 2020, some residents may want to complete the questionnaire but face challenges. Three main barriers are expected:

1. **Language:** While the Census internet questionnaire and Census Questionnaire Assistance will be available in 12 non-English languages, the paper questionnaire will be available in English and Spanish only. Since this is the first time the Census is being

offered online and there are concerns about data security, it is expected that many residents will prefer to complete the census on paper. Those residents who want to complete the paper questionnaire but have limited English and Spanish proficiency will require support in understanding and responding to survey questions (or support in completing the questionnaire online). They will most likely look to trusted service providers and community organizations for assistance.

2. **Literacy:** Residents who do not face language barriers may still face challenges understanding and answering Census survey questions. This may not just be a matter of literacy, but also due to confusion regarding race and ethnicity questions on the Census questionnaire as demonstrated in 2010¹¹ and in recent testing.¹² The Census Questionnaire Assistance Line is expected to be available only during regular business hours, which can be challenging to many who work or have other commitments during those same hours. Further, residents may not feel comfortable calling the Census Bureau directly with questions. Residents who have questions will likely turn to the County and other trusted organizations for assistance.
3. **Digital Access:** While there will be an option to respond to the Census 2020 via the traditional paper method, internet response will be promoted as the preferred option. The County will educate residents about the paper option; however, some residents may prefer to complete the Census questionnaire online but lack digital access. They will be searching for free and secure options to access the internet.

NOTE: The Census Bureau offers telephone assistance for those who are visually impaired as well as TRS options for those with hearing or speech disabilities. The County will work with the Complete Count Committee to ensure that residents with these and other disabilities are aware of accommodations as well as provided any assistance needed to complete the Census questionnaire.

If these challenges are not easy to overcome, some residents may not follow through on their intention to participate in the Census 2020. Therefore, the County will collaborate with the Complete Count Committee to establish the following:

Census Ambassador Program: Residents who want to serve as champions for their community will be trained and supported to educate residents about the importance of the Census, address questions/concerns, and provide support to complete the questionnaire. These trusted messengers will be critical in minimizing misinformation and motivating participation.

¹¹ County of San Mateo, 2010 Census Report: It's in Our Hands.

¹² <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/pmr-materials/04-20-2018/pmr-update-testing-04-20-2018.pdf?#>

Census Kiosks: Internet accessible devices (tablets, laptops, computers) for Census questionnaire completion online will be available across the County in places that are frequented by residents and easily accessible. Kiosks can support those that face digital access issues, as well as serve as a quick and convenient way for residents to complete the questionnaire.

Census Help Desk: Multi-lingual assistance will be provided 24/7 via text for residents who have questions or need support to complete the Census, with referral to in-person or phone assistance as needed. Information shared will be drawn from the Census library of answers for accuracy and consistency, but also include County-specific resources. This can also help monitor frequent questions and misinformation, so they can be addressed through outreach efforts.

Supporting Strategy: Enumerator Recruitment

While the County's goal is to encourage self-response (75% or higher), there will be some households that require follow-up. Census enumerators will begin conducting non-response follow up in May 2020 and will be an important component of ensuring a complete count.

The Census Bureau will be hiring up to 1000 enumerators for San Mateo County. It will be critical that they have the relevant language skills and cultural familiarity to locate, persuade, and interview residents in hard to count communities. Hiring enumerators with these qualifications will be a challenge for the Census Bureau due to: 1) restrictions on hiring non-citizens and 2) technology skills required for this position. Therefore, an important supporting strategy for the County will be to support the recruitment of well qualified local residents to serve as enumerators. This will be done through promotion of job opportunities through County and partner networks that support workforce development.

IMPLEMENTATION

The collaborative structure, strategies, and key activities presented in this plan will be implemented over the next two years to align with Census Bureau, State of California, and regional efforts. There will be three main phases over the next two years:

1. Phase 1: Building infrastructure for coordination and collaboration, which will include the launch of the Steering and Complete Count Committees.
2. Phase 2: Developing localized strategies, messaging, and materials to reach and motivate all residents to participate in Census 2020.
3. Phase 3: Implementing the communication and support campaign, including media and community outreach.

CENSUS 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

	Oct 2018 – Feb 2019 Phase 1: Infrastructure	March – August 2019 Phase 2: Strategy	Sept 2019 – May 2020 Phase 3: Implementation
Census Bureau	Training & Support	Research, Messaging, Materials	Media, Partnerships, Fielding
CA State	Guidance & Funding	Best Practices, Messaging, Materials	Media Campaign + Outreach Tracking
San Mateo County	Launch of Steering Committee + Complete Count Committee	Strategy Work Groups + Campaign Development + Localized Messaging + Tailored Materials	Media Campaign + Community Outreach + Support for Census Completion (Kiosks, Helpdesk,
Cities	City Officials: Participation in Steering Committee		Cities: Community Outreach
Community	Community Leaders: Participation in CCC and SWGs		CBOs: Community Action Teams + Ambassador Program

With the significant underfunding of the decennial census at the federal level and the considerable challenges facing the effort, it is estimated that it will cost approximately \$3.2 million over the next two years to ensure as complete and accurate count as possible of all San Mateo County residents. The proposed budget will allow for the County to develop localized messaging and outreach materials, execute a comprehensive communication campaign (including media buys), fund outreach services, coordinate and facilitate countywide efforts, and appropriately staff the project through its completion.

The County will continue to advocate vigorously for the public and private partners who benefit from the County's complete count plan to share the costs, leverage resources where possible, and seek opportunities (i.e., funding, in-kind, resources) from philanthropic partnerships.

It is anticipated that the State will provide counties with financial support for outreach efforts, however the apportionment for local counties has not been determined. The remainder of the budget request will be addressed in the upcoming budget cycle.