



LRO SNAPSHOT

A policy brief from the Legislative Research Office

Nebraska's important role in the upcoming Census

By Tim Erickson, GIS Analyst

The federal decennial census is one of the cornerstones of our political system. Established in the first few lines of the U.S. Constitution, the original census was conducted in 1790 and has occurred every 10 years since. It is used to draw electoral districts, allocate hundreds of billions in federal funds, and conduct a wide array of social science.

The 2020 Census is fast approaching. While April 1, 2020, is designated as Census Day, the actual counting will begin in January 2020. The groundwork for the 2020 Census has already been underway for nearly four years. The Legislative Research Office (LRO) is charged with working with the U.S. Census Bureau and Nebraska counties in preparation for the census. Additionally, the Census Bureau is establishing a state office in Lincoln for the 2020 Census and has begun hiring key personnel.

5 Phases of the 2020 Census

- **Phase 1— Block Boundary Suggestion Project.** This phase enables those at the state level to review existing block boundaries and to provide to the Census Bureau any data, geodatabases, and shapefiles reflecting updates and changes to those boundaries, that have occurred since the 2010 Census. This phase took place in 2017-2019.
- **Phase 2—Collection and Verification of Voting District Boundaries.** This phase involves the collection of voting district boundaries, updates to census blocks in each rural area, city, county, legislative district, and congressional district and other political subdivisions. The information is transmitted to the Census Bureau. The bureau uses this information to update its boundary information. The target date for completion of Phase 2 by the state is May 31, 2019.



"Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States ... according to their respective Numbers ... The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years."

- Article 1, section 2
of the U.S. Constitution

The goal of Phase 1 and Phase 2 is to review, update, and change geographical boundaries, also known as census geography, so the Census Bureau has the most correct and current boundaries for purposes of conducting the 2020 Census.

- **Phase 3—Delivery of Data Files.** During Phase 3, the Census Bureau delivers data files to each state. The data files include the updated census geography and population count from the 2020 Census. The estimated release of Nebraska's data files is March 2021.
- **Phase 4—Collection of post-2020 Census Redistricting Plans.** Each state submits its new redistricting plans to the Census Bureau.
- **Phase 5—Evaluation of 2020 Census Redistricting.** Shortly after redistricting is completed, the Census Bureau conducts an evaluation of the process for purposes of improving the process for the next decade.

Why is the census important?

The census is important to the State of Nebraska and its residents. Census information is used to:

- Apportion representation among the states;
- Distribute federal dollars to states;
- Draw congressional and state legislative districts and other political election districts;
- Inform planning decisions of federal, tribal, state, and local government; and
- Inform organizational decisions of businesses and nonprofits, such as where to locate, size of market, etc.

Based on census data, more than \$2.5 billion per year is distributed to Nebraska. According to the Census Bureau, that is a per capita allocation of \$1,342 per person.



What information does the census collect?

- The number of people living or staying at a residence as of April 1, 2020;
- Whether the home is owned or rented;
- The sex of each person in the household;
- The age of each person in the household;
- The race of each person in the household;
- Whether each person in the household is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin;
- The relationship of each person in the household to the primary person; and
- Perhaps, the citizenship status of each person in the household.

The addition of a citizenship question is a primary source of contention surrounding the 2020 Census. A number of states have challenged the merits of asking the question. On April 23, 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments regarding whether the citizenship question should be included on the 2020 Census. A decision is expected by the end of June 2019.

Notably, the 2020 Census will never ask for:

- A person's Social Security number;
- Money or donations;
- Anything on behalf of a political party; and
- Any bank or credit card account numbers.

Census data can only be used for statistical purposes. Federal law requires the Census Bureau to protect personal information collected via the census. Any government employee who discloses any confidential census information is guilty of a felony, punishable by up to five years' imprisonment and \$250,000 in penalties.

The image shows a sample of the 2010 U.S. Census form, Form D-61. The form is titled "United States Census 2010" and includes the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, and U.S. Census Bureau logos. It contains several sections of questions and checkboxes, including:

- Start here:** Instructions on how to count people and where to count them.
- 1. How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2010?** Includes a box for the number of people.
- 2. Were there any additional people staying here April 1, 2010 that you did not include in Question 1?** Includes checkboxes for children, relatives, nonrelatives, and people staying temporarily.
- 3. Is this house, apartment, or mobile home —** Includes checkboxes for ownership, rental, and occupancy.
- 4. What is your telephone number?** Includes a box for the area code and number.
- 5. Please provide information for each person living here.** Includes fields for name, sex, age, and date of birth.
- 6. What is Person 1's sex?** Includes checkboxes for Male and Female.
- 7. What is Person 1's age and what is Person 1's date of birth?** Includes boxes for age, month, day, and year.
- 8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?** Includes checkboxes for No, Yes (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban), and Yes (other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin).
- 9. What is Person 1's race?** Includes checkboxes for White, Black, American Indian, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Other Asian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Other Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, and Some other race.
- 10. Does Person 1 sometimes live or stay somewhere else?** Includes checkboxes for In college housing, In the military, At a seasonal or second residence, For child custody, In jail or prison, In a nursing home, and For another reason.

A sample census form from 2010.

The American Communities Survey

The American Communities Survey (ACS) is also conducted by the Census Bureau. The ACS gathers data and information about a myriad of categories from business to education to veterans. ACS data is updated regularly during the 10 years between the decennial censuses. The ACS also incorporates some sampling and estimates of information (usually in five-year averages).

References

1. McCully, C. (2014, December). Designing P.L. 94-171 Redistricting Data For the Year 2020 Census. U.S. Census Bureau Briefing, p. 7.
2. New York vs. U.S. Department of Commerce, 739 F. Supp. 761 (E.D.N.Y. 1990) (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York June 7, 2018).
3. Ramirez-Salazar, B. E. (2018). Preparing for Census 2020. 29th Annual Nebraska Data Users Conference (p. 3). Omaha: U.S. Census Bureau.
4. U.S. Census Bureau. (March 2018). Questions Planned for the 2020 Census and American Community Survey. Washington D.C.: U.S. Census