2020 CENSUS TRUSTED MESSENGERS
COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS CHALLENGED TO MAKE THE MARGINALIZED MATTER
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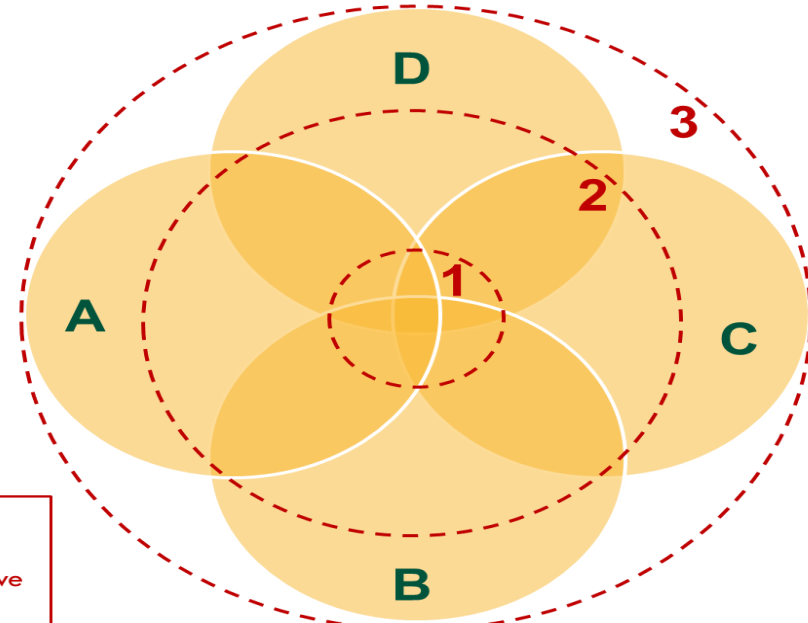
SUMMARY

The decennial census is the most inclusive civic activity in our country. As the cornerstone of the United States democracy, the count determines representation in Congress and the Electoral College, as well as provides the basis for drawing districts for federal, state, and local offices. $880 billion in Federal funding allocation and civil rights policy enforcement also rely on accurate census results. The nonprofit sector uses census data to develop, execute, and evaluate their programs as well as organize residents for civic and political participation. Certain population groups – referred to as "hard-to-count" – are at a higher risk of not being counted in the census and can lead to unequal political representation and inequitable access to vital public and private resources for these groups and their communities.

PURPOSE

"**Quality information is a public good**, and much effort goes into its dissemination in formats accessible to commercial firms, the nonprofit sector, the media, and social scientists whose research helps to show the country where it has been and where it might be going" (Hillygus, Nie, Prewitt, & Pals, 2006, p.78). We have one chance every 10 years to get an accurate and fair count of every person living in our country.

IDENTIFYING HARD-TO-COUNT (HTC) POPULATIONS

A. **Hard to Interview** - Participation hindered by language barriers, low literacy, lack of internet access
B. **Hard to Persuade** - Suspicious of the government, low levels of civic engagement
C. **Hard to Locate** – Non-conventional housing units and/or persons wanting to remain hidden
D. **Hard to Contact** - Highly mobile, people experiencing homelessness, physical access barriers such as gated communities

Census Outreach Challenge for CBOs
1. **High** – Has all of the factors above
2. **Medium** – Has two of the factors above
3. **Low** – Has one of the factors above

Source: Author's creation. Elaborated from Chapin et al., 2018.

RESEARCH

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have earned the trust of residents from historically hard-to-count communities and have the potential to increase census participation in a challenging climate if provided an effective outreach model.

1. Given the current political climate, attitudes and barriers in the upcoming 2020 Census, what do CBOs propose as the most impactful outreach activities to motivate hard-to-count communities to participate?
2. How do CBOs think survey collection procedures will impact census participation in hard-to-count communities?
3. What approaches are CBOs taking to maximize impact of census outreach without adding capacity and can they be synthesized into a toolkit?

METHODS

Data collection followed a **mixed method approach** including secondary data from a **review of relevant literature and Census data** analysis focused on hard-to-count populations.

a) Utilized existing research conducted and published by the U.S. Census Bureau
b) Leveraged CBO leadership interviews to compare findings from research with current practices for successful outreach in hard-to-count communities
c) Attended 2020 Census convenings and gathered perspectives from expert presenters and panel discussions
d) Capitalized on role at Canal Alliance to advise on pragmatic recommendations

DATA AND ANALYSIS

PERCENTAGE NET UNDERCOUNT BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN

	1990	2000	2010
Non-Hispanic White	0.68	-1.13	-0.84
Non-Hispanic Black	4.57	1.84	2.07
Non-Hispanic Asian	2.36	-0.75	0.08
American Indian on Reservation	12.22	-0.88	4.88
American Indian off Reservation	0.68	0.62	-1.95
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.36	2.12	1.34
Hispanic Origin	4.99	0.71	1.54

• **Statistically significantly different from zero**
• **Negative number indicates an overcount**

Source: United States Census Bureau [website], 2012. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/20120512_ccm_newsconf_slides.pdf

POTENTIAL EXTENT OF CITIZENSHIP QUESTION AS BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION IN THE 2020 CENSUS ON PERCEIVED RISKS

Audience	Purpose: Find Undocumented Immigrants	Confidentiality: Data Shared to Facilitate Deportation	Political Targeting: Community and Residents of Status at Risk	Potential Extent of Barrier
Chinese	Mixed	Yes	No	Low
MENA (Women)	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
MENA (Men)	Mixed	Yes	No	Medium
NHPI	Mixed	Yes	No	Low
Spanish (U.S. Mainland)	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Vietnamese	Mixed	Yes	No	Medium

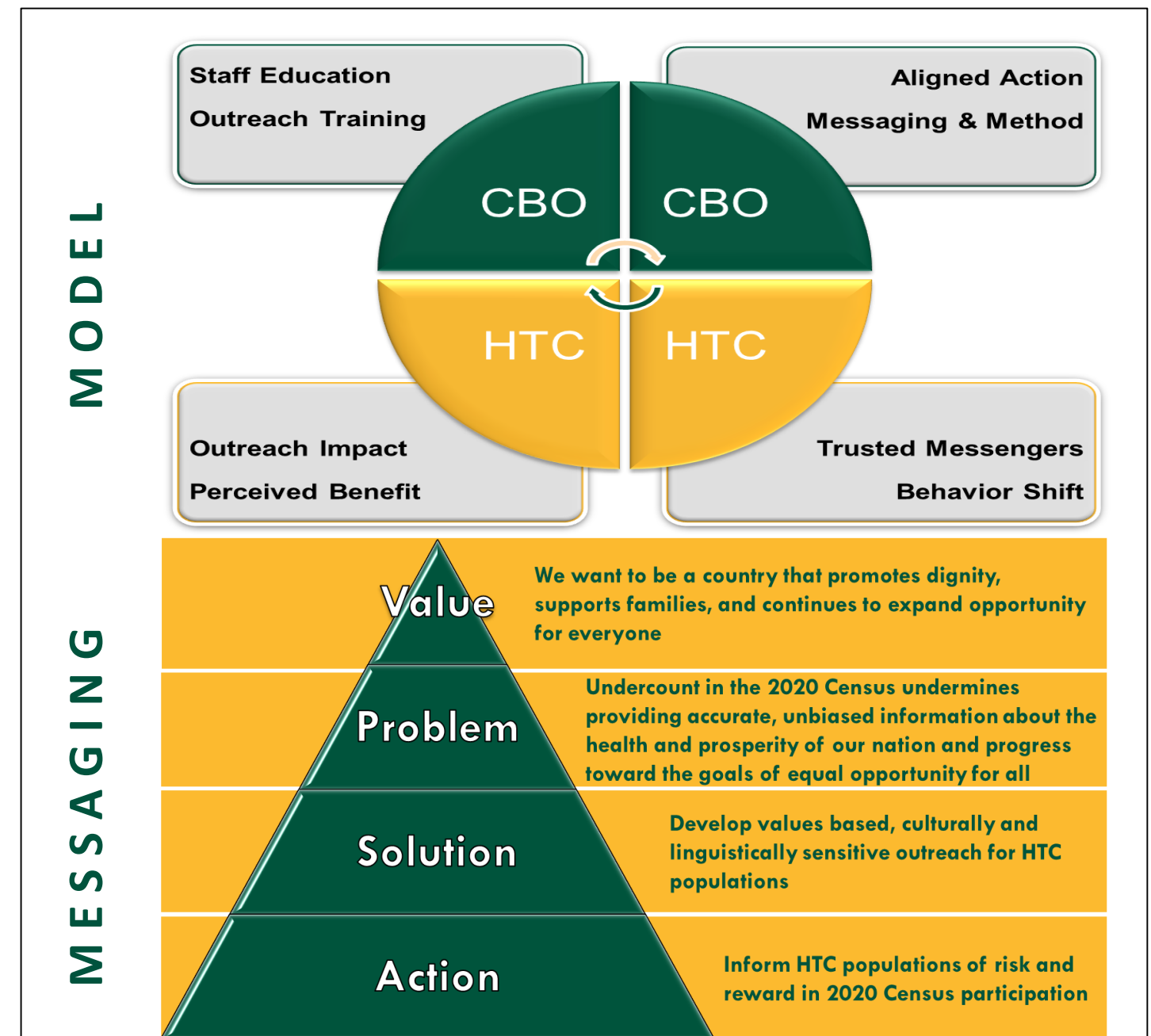MENA = Middle Eastern North African

NHPI = Non-Hispanic Pacific Islander

Source: Evans, Levy, Miller-Gonzalez, Vines, Girón, Walejko, Bates & Trejo, 2019, p.53

RESULTS

A. **Many people were unfamiliar with the census**, with only 33 percent being "extremely" or "very" familiar. Knowledge about the purpose and process of the census was uneven across groups.
B. Funding for public services was a top participation motivator across groups, yet **less than half of respondents knew that the census is used to determine community funding**.
C. Messaging is needed to **convey how the census directly benefits local communities**, now and in the future.
D. Providing information about the Census Bureau's data protection policies will not alone **mitigate respondent concerns around privacy and confidentiality**.
E. **Trusted voices** and organizations with deep community roots may **facilitate participation among the most skeptical** by:
   i. Providing information about the community funding and the general census process
   ii. Assuring people that participation is safe

RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in CBO staff education and training on the 2020 Census	✓ Create training materials for all CBOs within a county or region ✓ Train champions at each CBO to advance outreach efforts
Identify CBO trusted messengers in the community	✓ Utilize digital and face-to-face canvassing to GOTC (get of the count) ✓ Build shared communications hub to support all trusted messenger outreach efforts
Provide CBOs with outreach toolkits targeted to their HTC group using best practice frameworks	✓ Use Opportunity Agenda Framework to develop messaging ✓ Use Align Action Framework to collaborate on activities and measure progress

MODEL

Staff Education / Outreach Training

Aligned Action / Messaging & Method

CBO — CBO
HTC — HTC

Outreach Impact / Perceived Benefit

Trusted Messengers / Behavior Shift

MESSAGING

- **Value** — We want to be a country that promotes dignity, supports families, and continues to expand opportunity for everyone
- **Problem** — Undercount in the 2020 Census undermines providing accurate, unbiased information about the health and prosperity of our nation and progress toward the goals of equal opportunity for all
- **Solution** — Develop values based, culturally and linguistically sensitive outreach for HTC populations
- **Action** — Inform HTC populations of risk and reward in 2020 Census participation

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Brennan Center for Justice 2020 Census [webpage]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/2020-census

CA Census 2020 [website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://census.ca.gov/

Census Counts [website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://censuscounts.org/

Census 20/20 [website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.census2020now.org/tools

Census 2020: Why an Accurate Count Matters to Philanthropy [webpage]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.unitedphilforum.org/census2020

Hágase Contar [website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://hagasecontar.org/

United States Census 2020 [website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://2020census.gov/en