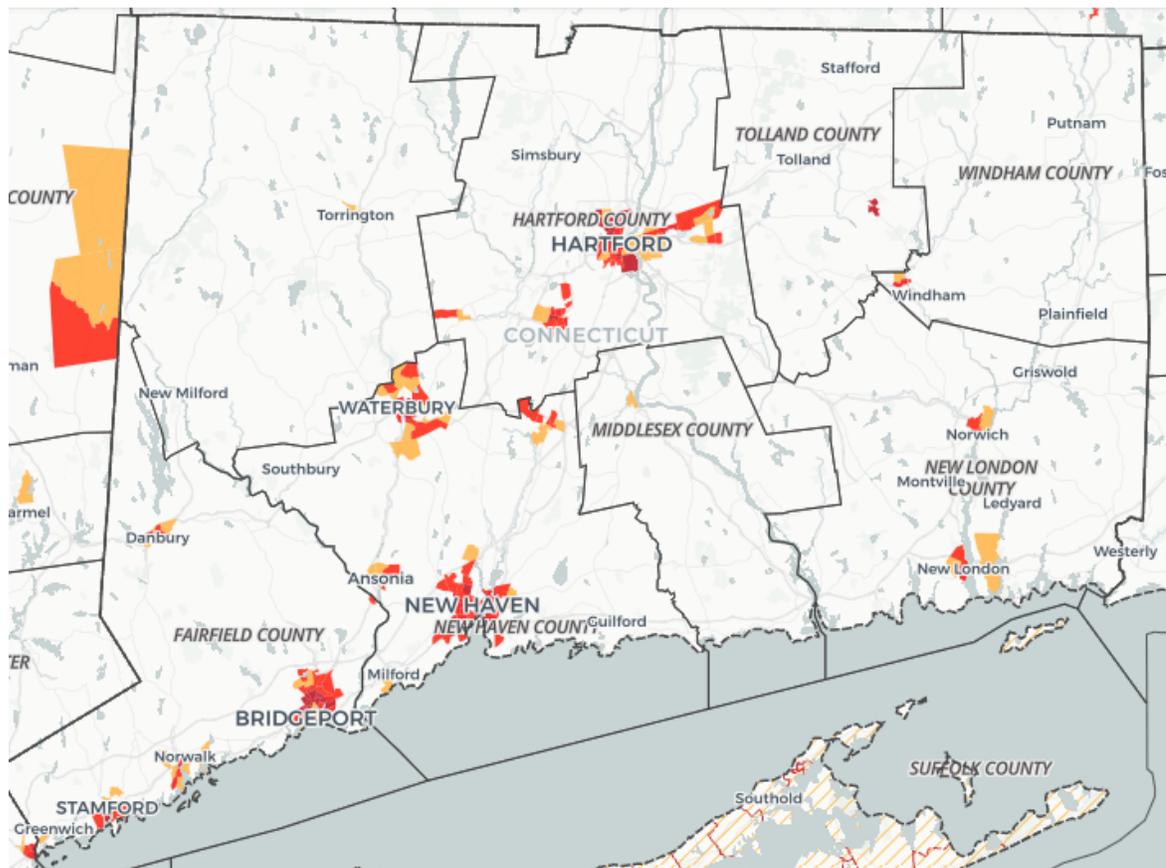


In some states, the census is an investment. Not Connecticut.



(<https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us>)

CUNY MAPPING CENTER/US CENSUS

This interactive map shows the hard-to-count census tracts. Red signifies the ones with the lowest response rates in 2010. Click on the map to explore individual tracts.

To help the U.S. Census Bureau get closer to a complete count in the 2020 census, California is spending \$187 million, a ninefold increase over 2010. New Jersey has committed \$9.5 million, its first significant investment in the count. New York City is spending a record \$40 million, with the state adding \$20 million.

Massachusetts, which has calculated a loss of \$2,400 in federal aid in the state for every resident missed in the census, has appropriated \$2.5 million. Boston is providing small

grants to non-profits to help reach into hard-to-count communities. Rhode Island has committed at least \$500,000 to the cause.

The appropriation in Connecticut? Zero.

Connecticut is among the half of states in the nation spending no money on the census, instead relying on philanthropy and networks of volunteer committees to bolster U.S. Census workers, who will try to find and count the millions of Americans who do not respond next spring.

“I have had non-profits offer to do dollar-to-dollar matches with state funding. If we were to take advantage of that kind of funding, it would be in hard to count areas.”

Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz

“The states have never had to put money in, to be honest,” said Secretary of the State Denise Merrill, a co-chair of the Connecticut Complete Count Committee. “But this is the first year we’re very worried, because it’s almost all online.”

For the first time, the U.S. Census is going to ask the majority of Americans to answer the census online, a challenge in census tracts on the wrong side of the digital divide – places where anywhere from 25% or more homes are without web access. Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Connecticut's smaller cities are dotted with them.

Legislators earmarked no money for the census in the 2019 session. A bill that would have created a local grants program got no serious attention from legislative leaders, and the measure died in the Planning and Development Committee without a vote.

In Connecticut, the complete count campaign is overseen by Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz. She says she has not given up on wringing some money from the state, but the Office of Policy and Management has not identified available discretionary funds, even though she says state money could leverage more philanthropic dollars.

"As I have been out across the state with our complete count committees, I have had non-profits offer to do dollar-to-dollar matches with state funding," Bysiewicz said. "If we were to take advantage of that kind of funding, it would be in hard to count areas."



Hard-to-count census tracts are defined as those where fewer than 74% of mailed surveys were completed and returned in 2010. Of the 831 census tracts in Connecticut, 218 fell short of the 74% mark.

The three tracts with the lowest return rates are represented by House Majority Leader Matt Ritter, D-Hartford.

His racially and economically diverse district includes blocks of handsome, even palatial, homes in the West End and grittier precincts in Asylum Hill and Upper Albany. Census tract 5033 in Asylum Hill returned just 47.4% of census surveys in 2010. On opposite sides of Albany Avenue are census tracts 5014 and 5035, with returns of 50.8% and 41.1%.

Ninety percent of the 563 households in census tract 5035 in Hartford – the one with the 41.1% participation rate – are rentals. Thirty percent have no reliable internet access, the average for the city. Nearly half the residents have incomes below the poverty level. Twenty-seven percent are foreign born. These demographics are typical of hard-to-count tracts.

Thirty-six of Hartford's 40 tracts are considered hard to count. In Bridgeport, it's 34 of 38.

Ritter knows what it takes to get out the vote in those neighborhoods, and he suspects the same will be required for the census.

"The only tried and true method I know is door knocking," he said.

Ritter said he recently approached the co-chair of the Appropriations Committee, Rep. Toni Walker, D-New Haven, about state funding for the census, a belated effort. With nearly 25% of the state's census tracts deemed hard to count, Connecticut is risking the loss of significant federal aid that is based on population.

"We are very worried about federal funding being cut," Ritter said.

Stakes for Connecticut: \$10.7 billion in federal aid

Census Bureau researchers (<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/working-papers/Uses-of-Census-Bureau-Data-in-Federal-Funds-Distribution.pdf>) estimated in 2017 that \$675 billion was distributed nationally through at least 132 programs, based on census data, in fiscal 2015. Medicaid,



Cities and towns across Connecticut have formed volunteer committees to help with the census.

school lunches, Head Start, highway planning and construction, Pell grants for college students, Section 8 housing vouchers, special education and vocational rehabilitation grants to the states were among the dozens of affected programs.

A state-by-state analysis

(<https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/Counting%20Dollars%20Brief%20%235%20May%202019.pdf>) by The George Washington University of 55 large federal programs found that census data figured in the calculation of \$10.7 billion in aid to recipients in Connecticut in fiscal 2016, including \$1 billion in federal direct student loans and \$243 million in Pell grants.

“The state has incredible self interest here,” said Karla Fortunato, the president of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy.

“We are very worried about federal funding being cut.”

House Majority Leader Matt Ritter

Census data sets are used to define eligibility criteria, compute formulas, and rank project applications. They also are used to set interest rates for federal loan programs.

“It has serious ramifications for us,” said Rep. Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, who filed legislation in the 2019 session to establish a funding mechanism to assist the census in hard-to-count tracts.

In September, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving awarded grants totaling \$448,400 to 20 community organizations in support of voter registration and the census, both activities that depend on a degree of community engagement. Neighborhoods with poor political participation often are the same ones that do not respond to the census.

The recipients included public libraries in Hartford and East Hartford. Sarah Morgan, the library director in East Hartford, said she will use \$25,000 to hire staff who can help residents complete the census online and, if necessary, do outreach outside the library.

“We’ve got money on the table. There is a hope – and if I could use the word, expectation – the state would be able to come up with money to match that.”

Jay Williams
President, Hartford Foundation

Jay Williams, the president of the Hartford Foundation, said his and other community foundations are ready to provide more money – on one condition.

“We’ve got money on the table. There is a hope – and if I could use the word, expectation – the state would be able to come up with money to match that,” Williams said.

The Hartford Foundation was one of just three organizations to submit testimony in support of Rojas’ bill last spring.

“I think people see the census as way off, but it’s not,” Rojas said. “It’s April.”

March, actually.

Post cards will go out in March instructing recipients how to complete an online survey. A paper survey will be mailed to areas with poor internet connectivity and to households that do not responded to four mailings by April 8.

“We’ll start knocking on doors in the majority of the country in mid-May,” said Jeff Behler, the census director for the New York region, which stretches from New Jersey to Maine and also includes Puerto Rico.

The Census Bureau is now taking applications for 11,000 temporary workers in Connecticut. The jobs will last six to 12 weeks and pay between \$21 and \$25 an hour.

‘There is a fear out there.’

While the decennial census is a federal responsibility, the states are now playing a larger role, a reflection of concern that response rates will fall next year. Behler has heard the questions and concerns.

Will the Trump administration’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants, as well as controversy over a citizenship question that reached the Supreme Court, discourage immigrants? Will others have faith in the confidentiality and security of the surveys, whether completed on paper or online?

By law, census surveys cannot be shared with law enforcement, immigration, zoning enforcement or anyone else.

“There is a fear out there,” said Behler, who is working on his third census. “We see it in our current surveys. We see from the responses every day. They just don’t trust the federal government. They don’t know how this data will be used.”



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Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz was joined by Attorney General William Tong and other state officials in June to protest the Trump administration's attempt to including a citizenship question in the 2020 census.

Getting an accurate count means winning the confidence of immigrants, the poor and others who might feel vulnerable because they are living in rooms that do not meeting zoning or housing standards.

"We don't care if you illegally subdivided your home," Behler said. "We care that everybody is counted."

Behler said state or charitable spending to help with outreach would be helpful, but it's not the most important factor.

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Jeff Behler
New York region census director

“What is most important is the community engagement,” Behler said. On that score, he said, Connecticut is doing well, with 94 complete count committees, each providing important entries into hard to count communities.

“In Connecticut, the lieutenant governor and her team have been amazing. It’s like no other state in the area, to be honest,” he said. “They have from day one been aggressive in meeting the stakeholders and getting the message out.”

The statewide Complete Count Committee has met only once. Bysiewicz said most of the effort has been helping to establish and encourage the local committees. The goal, she said, is to find the “trusted voices” of every community, especially in immigrant communities fearful of interactions with the government.

“There is a lot of misinformation about this,” Bysiewicz said. “So, we need our trusted partners to get the message out that the census is safe, that none of the information that is collected can be used by federal law enforcement.”

Those trusted partners can range from large groups like the NAACP and AFL-CIO to local pastors and workers at non-profit community agencies.

Fortunato, the leader of the philanthropy council, said non-profits want to help but their resources are limited.

“Non-profits are already stretched pretty thin here in Connecticut,” Fortunato said. “The notion they can also add outreach for the census without any support is...”

She did not complete the sentence.

