

Chicago Tribune

2010 Census: Illinois making push to boost participation Program to dole out grants to groups to promote the nationwide count

By Oscar Avila Tribune reporter
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A push to reverse low census participation in Illinois will soon be coming via barber, baby-sitter, tax preparer, librarian and even iTunes download, part of a first-of-its-kind collaboration by local charities.

The "Count Me In" project on Wednesday will announce \$1.2 million in grants to 26 groups for census outreach in 37 traditionally undercounted **Chicago** neighborhoods and cities around Illinois.

The foundations said they are worried that non-profits have slashed their budgets because of the faltering economy and will not have the necessary resources to promote the 2010 Census, which takes place next spring.

"Every 10 years, the census finds itself in a more challenging position getting everyday citizens to engage in the effort," said Ngoan Le, vice president for programs at the Chicago Community Trust.

Among the projects that will receive funding:

--Voto Latino, founded by actress Rosario Dawson, will distribute a Census iTunes card and hold Chicago-area concerts open only to those who e-mail or text photos of themselves filling out the form.

--The Springfield Urban League will work with barbershops and beauty salons, churches and government agencies to target low-income households.

--The Center for Economic Progress will promote the census when it offers its free tax preparation to poor clients. Likewise, Illinois Action for Children will train participating day-care centers to talk to parents about the census.

--The Gail Borden Public Library District in Elgin will advertise the census in Spanish to clients when they check out materials.

Other participating agencies, from the United African Organization to the Polish American Association, will target immigrants with limited English skills. **The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**, for example, will enlist Census Fellows, bilingual volunteers who will go door to door in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations.

The other foundations participating are **Boeing Co.**'s foundation, Chicago Bar Foundation, Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, Grand Victoria Foundation, **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**, Polk Bros. Foundation, Steans Family Foundation and Woods Fund of Chicago.

Ellen Alberding, president of the Joyce Foundation, another participant, said charities from **California** and **Florida** have contacted the Illinois group to possibly replicate the grants in their own states.

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The Courier-News

Elgin ready for Census 2010

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By JANELLE WALKER For The Courier-News

ELGIN -- During the last census, Elgin's population was undercounted by 18 percent, city officials believe.

If that happens again, it could cost the city between \$300 million and \$350 million in lost funds from state, federal and other grant sources, Mayor Ed Schock told a crowd Tuesday afternoon.

» [Click to enlarge image](#)



A super-large mock 2010 census form is displayed Tuesday afternoon in the parking lot of Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin during the 2010 Count Me In Census Initiative kick-off event there.

(Marina Makropoulos/Staff Photographer)

This time around, Gail Borden Public Library is taking the lead on the census count and helping kick off the every-10-years event.

The library district was awarded a grant from the Count Me In Census Initiative to help conduct a public education campaign designed to boost participation in hard-to-count communities such as Elgin.

The Grand Victoria Foundation, the Joyce Foundation and a number of other funders pooled resources to create the Illinois Count Me In grants. The library also has agreed to serve as the liaison and work closely with the city to facilitate the census count here.

"It would be hard to overstate the importance of an accurate census," Schock said at the official kick-off event held at the library. In addition to goodie bags for the attendees, residents were able to meet and get an autograph from former Chicago Bear Calvin Thomas. Denise Raleigh, director of marketing and communications for the library, also set up a photo op with a 600-square-foot mock-up census form in the library parking lot.

The festivities provided one way to make the public aware that the census is set to begin, Raleigh said.

Not only are the actual population numbers needed for the funding they help to bring in, the numbers also are needed for city planning of parks, roads, infrastructure, policing and other community services, Schock said. The library also relies on census information for per-capita state funding.

Residents should start seeing census questionnaires in the mail beginning March 15, said Keith Nunnally, a partnership specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau. All questionnaires should be mailed out by April 1.

"The first 30 days are the most crucial, when we analyze the communities that send (the questionnaires) in," Nunnally said. The census bureau then decides how many "enumerators," or counters, are needed in a community to capture underreported numbers.

The 2010 census could be one of the hardest in recent memory, Nunnally added, because of the upheaval of the past decade. "If you consider all of the things that have happened in the last 10 years -- with Katrina, with foreclosures, the economy, the war, with the unemployment rate -- there are many, many reasons" that people may not be counted or may not want to return the census forms, he said.

"Not everybody is keen on the current government, so some people may throw it against the wall" in protest, Nunnally said.

However, the census bureau does not care whether a resident has citizenship, he said, and the information gleaned from the form is used for statistical purposes only. After the stats are calculated, the forms are locked up for the next 72 years, Nunnally said.

"We are giving back to the community that has done so much for this library," Raleigh said. "This is a huge challenge, but we are committed to bring Elgin's fair share home for people and organizations that need it."