

Census 2000 Update



Two years away and the 2000 census is already a politically charged one. Why is sampling for non-response such a hot issue? Sampling for non-response and integrated coverage measurement are two techniques the Census Bureau has developed to help eliminate, or at least reduce, the differential undercount. The nation as a whole was undercounted by 1.6% in the 1990 census. A good question might be: If they know how many people they missed, why couldn't they count them in the first place? Well, some people don't want to answer the census. This has become a growing problem as the proliferation of mail and telephone calls increases for many households. Some people don't participate because they don't want to be "found," as it were. And explaining that the census is confidential doesn't always convince people. Although follow-up procedures are used to get a questionnaire back from every household, there is only so much time and money that can be spent trying to get people to answer the census.

Carol O. Rogers

*Editor and Information Services
Director, Indiana Business
Research Center, Kelley School
of Business, Indiana University*

What Can Indiana Do to Get a Complete Count in 2000?

Local communities can participate in LUCA—the Local Update of Census Addresses. This is a voluntary opportunity to check the census address list to ensure that every housing unit is accounted for and eventually receives a questionnaire. In February 1998, the highest elected official in every county, city, town, and township in Indiana received a letter from the Census Bureau asking for participation. So far, 45% of those officials have responded; of those, 53% have indicated they will participate (see the map).

Communities can also create Complete Count Committees, garnering support from government, business, education, the media, and local citizens to get the word out about the census in 2000 and the importance of filling out and returning the questionnaire. If you want to know more about these two specific activities, please contact us at the IBRC (317-274-2979) or contact the Census Bureau at 1-888-688-6948 (toll free).

The Census Bureau has sent the questions for 2000 to Congress. There will be the 100% form. The short form includes seven questions, compared to 13 in 1990. The long form has 52 questions, compared to 57 in 1990. The questionnaire itself, as it stands in draft form, is a major improvement over past forms in terms of user-friendliness. The type is bigger, you don't have to search your child's backpack for a #2 pencil to fill it out, and the questions are easier to understand. More than 300 million questionnaires will be printed. Printing has to begin in April 1999 in order for the forms to be ready to mail out in March 2000. Every one of the 120 million estimated households in 2000 will receive the mailing twice. Believe it or not, this was found to be far cheaper than trying to send a second form only to those households that have not responded by the target date. To ensure that everyone has a chance to be counted, "Be Counted" forms will be widely available.

Other Census News

The American Community Survey has selected 37 additional sites in which to conduct tests in 1999. Two of those are in Indiana—Miami and Lake counties. Public meetings about the tests were held in early June and garnered the interest of citizens, business people, the media, economic developers, utilities, and others who need census-type information on a more regular basis. If funding continues for this survey, communities across Indiana could receive income, education levels, employment, commuting, and other types of data on an annual basis, rather than every 10 years. The basic idea is to eventually replace the long form of the ten-year census and provide information on a more timely basis.

