

Frequently asked questions

Responding to the 2020 Census

When does the 2020 Census start?

The enumeration starts in remote Alaska on January 21, 2020, but most households will receive their census materials by U.S. mail or hand delivery starting in mid-March. Online and telephone response options will be available starting after March 12.

What is “Census Day,” and why is it important?

April 1 is “Census Day.” When you respond to the census, you tell the Census Bureau where you live as of April 1, 2020, and include everyone living in your home on that day (including newborns and anyone staying there who does not have a usual home elsewhere). While April 1 is the reference date, people can submit their questionnaire before or after that date.

When is the last day people can respond?

To avoid a home visit from a Census Bureau employee, people should respond before the end of April 2020. The Census Bureau will begin in-person visits in May, although households can still respond online, by phone, or by mail until July 31.

How long does it take to fill out the form?

The Census Bureau estimates that it will take about 10 minutes to complete the census questionnaire, depending on the number of people in the household.

What happens if I leave some responses blank?

The Census Bureau strongly encourages respondents to answer every question for every person in the household, but will allow submission of incomplete questionnaires. Bureau staff may follow up on incomplete submissions.

In what languages will the paper form be available?

Paper questionnaires will be either in English or bilingual English-Spanish (with Spanish-only forms in Puerto Rico).

What should people do if they have a question or problem?

The [Census Questionnaire Assistance](#)⁵⁹ phone line will be available with live customer service representatives supporting 13 languages and TDD from March 9 through July 31. Call toll-free 844-330-2020 in English, and [see page 17](#) for other languages. People can also find general answers about the 2020 Census at 2020census.gov.

Online response option

Do people have to respond online?

No, households have the option to respond to the census online, by phone, or by mail.



In what languages will the online form be printed?

The online form will be available in English and 12 non-English languages: Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

Can people respond on a smartphone or tablet?

Yes, the online form will be optimized to allow people to respond on a smartphone or tablet.

In what ways will responding to the census be accessible for people with disabilities?

The Census Bureau will disseminate language guides in braille and large print to respondents through their partnership programs. Respondents will also have access to a video guide in American Sign Language to help complete the census online. Additionally, respondents may choose to complete the census in English via a phone line that uses Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY) technology. Learn more at GCPI's FAQ on [An Accessible 2020 Census](#).⁶⁸

Can census responses be shared with law enforcement or other government agencies?

No. Title 13 of the U.S. Code protects the confidentiality of personal information provided in census responses. Federal law prohibits the Census Bureau from sharing personal census responses with any other government agencies, courts, or private entities, for any purpose. Census staff take a lifetime oath to protect census responses, with severe penalties for violations. The law prohibits personal information collected by the Census Bureau from being used against respondents by any government agency or court.

I heard the U.S. Government used census data to identify and intern Japanese Americans during World War II. Why should we trust the government now?

The Census Act (Title 13 U.S.C.) did not provide the same level of strict confidentiality protections then as it does now. Furthermore, the standard protections that existed at the time were suspended under the Second War Powers Act starting in March 1942. *Confidentiality provisions tied to census data were reinstated in 1947, and Congress subsequently amended the Census Act to close any potential "loopholes" related to the strict prohibition on sharing personally identifiable data outside of the Census Bureau for any purpose.* In 2010, the U.S. Justice Department determined that the Patriot Act does not override the law that protects the confidentiality of individual census responses. No court of law can subpoena census responses or enforce such a subpoena issued by another entity (e.g., a government agency).

How can libraries help address the undercount of people experiencing homelessness?

Library staff can raise awareness of the fact that people experiencing homelessness have been undercounted in the past, depriving their communities of fair representation and funding for programs such as housing vouchers, Medicaid and homeless youth programs. The [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#)⁶⁹ states: The best way to be sure they are counted is for them to speak with staff at the location where they receive services to confirm when and where the census workers will be coming (March 30–April 1). They can share this information with others who are homeless so they can be counted, too. Keep in mind, however, that some people experiencing homelessness may be temporarily staying in a household at the time of the census. It is vital that those households include these members on their census forms.

How should non-binary and transgender people complete the census form?

The [National LGBTQ Task Force](#)⁷⁰ states: Like many surveys, the census restricts responses to "male" or "female" only. Transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people can self-identify in the way that feels most comfortable for them. The Census Bureau does not cross-reference individuals' answers on the census with any other documentation.

Census hiring

Can people with criminal records be hired to help with the 2020 Census?

The Census Bureau will make hiring decisions on a case-by-case basis, following a background check that includes fingerprinting and a records search.

Can non-citizens be hired to help with the 2020 Census?

The Census Bureau can hire work-authorized non-citizens for temporary census jobs when a qualified citizen is not available, such as for positions that require non-English language skills. Jobseekers can apply at 2020census.gov/jobs.

