



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
Board of Supervisors



DATE: June 17, 2010
BOARD MEETING DATE: June 29, 2010
SPECIAL NOTICE/HEARING: No
VOTE REQUIRED: Majority

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson
SUBJECT: 2010 Census Final Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept this report on the 2010 Census Final Report

BACKGROUND:

With 75% of households returning their census questionnaires, San Mateo County achieved identical mail participation rates (MPR) in the 2000 and 2010 Censuses. This left San Mateo County 3% above the overall national MPR average (of 72%) in both 2000 and 2010.

As of early May 2010, San Mateo County had achieved the 3rd highest MPR of all California counties. In overall participation, San Mateo County had achieved the 9th highest once considering early door-to-door enumeration that had begun in more rural counties.

Due to increased joblessness, home foreclosures, non-English speaking residents, and sentiments of distrust in government, it was clear there were many obstacles to achieve a complete and accurate count in 2010. To combat such obstacles, the Census team collaborated with local and bay area partners to create a comprehensive outreach plan with a focus on hard-to-count (HTC) communities. Overall, there was an increase of 8% in the 18 hardest-to-count communities in San Mateo County.

DISCUSSION:

I. BEST PRACTICES:

Community Based Organizations (CBO) were successful in their outreach efforts because of their ability to integrate census messaging into the community. In the final San Mateo County Complete Count Committee (CCC) meeting on May 6, 2010, the committee discussed best practices for successful outreach:

- 1) In partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2010 Census focused on education and outreach in HTC communities. Silicon Valley Community Foundation provided grants to 17 organizations in San Mateo County to help them with their outreach efforts. The community foundation provided a total of \$222,850 for the San Mateo County 2010 Census Campaign.
- 2) On-the-ground Outreach: It is estimated that on average United States residents were exposed to census messaging 10 times before Census Day through radio advertisements, TV commercials, newspaper advertisements, articles, and billboards. Despite the extensive media campaign, many residents still neglected to participate in the Census. This proves the necessity of on-the-ground outreach to supplement the national marketing strategies.

The Multicultural Institute, servicing the day laborers in North Fair Oaks, exemplified the effectiveness of on-the-ground outreach. The Multicultural Institute organized promotional census walks along Middlefield Road to hand out census backpacks and distribute information. The organization also arranged a day laborers soccer game against the partnership staff. These activities helped alleviate fears associated with the census, and allowed North Fair Oaks to achieve a 75% MPR as of April 28, 2010.

- 3) Pooling Resources: Many organizations did not have adequate resources to conduct thorough outreach alone, so it was necessary to partner with other local CBOs.

In South San Francisco, there were two leading CBOs that organized the local census outreach efforts - the Community Learning Center (CLC) and North Peninsula Neighborhood Services Center (NPNSC). Both organizations were in regular communication and took responsibility for outreach efforts in HTC communities. The collaboration of these two organizations revealed the benefits of pooling resources to achieve higher results. South San Francisco had achieved a 75 % MPR as of April 28, 2010.

- 4) Identifying Correct Motivators: There are various motivators that affect an individual's decision to participate in the census. Motivators vary from federal funding allocation, congressional representation, ethnic/ racial inclinations, avoiding Census Workers that would otherwise visit one's household, etc. Identifying the correct motivation(s) was very important when promoting messaging and encouraging residents to participate.

The Pacific Islander Complete Count Committee (CCC) exemplified how to successfully motivate Census participation in their ethnic community. In 2000, the Pacific Islander population only achieved a 61 % MPR and was the most undercounted race/ ethnic group. This undercount translated into less representation and federal funds to the Pacific Islander community. This motivated many individuals to create the Pacific Islander CCC with the goal to increase mail and overall participation rates within their community. While we

cannot measure the results of the Pacific Islander Community until the census figures are released in April of 2011, we are confident these numbers will reveal a more accurate reflection of the Pacific Islander community living in San Mateo County.

- 5) Student Messengers: With approximately 90,000 students enrolled in 182 schools, the San Mateo County school system was a viable way to reach many HTC populations. Many times students will serve as a family's main translator or messenger of information. For this reason, the County identified students as potential census messengers. The County worked with various student volunteer groups and launched the "Be Counted Poster Contest" to educate students on the importance of the census.

The "Be Counted Poster Contest" asked students to submit a poster depicting how "Everyone Counts". In total, 330 students submitted posters from 24 schools and after schools programs. A total of 49 winners were selected and rewarded prizes from the County Supervisors at four awards ceremonies held throughout the county. The poster contest brought a fun and youthful tone to the census, which in turn, alleviated many fears behind participating.

II. LESSONS LEARNED:

While we were overall pleased with the results, we encountered unexpected challenges throughout the outreach process. Two of these challenges included changes in HTC communities and mailing misclassifications.

- 1) Change in HTC Communities: The economic climate changed many neighborhoods since the previous decennial census. Many of the neighborhoods that were not considered HTC in 2000, achieved sub par MPRs in 2010. There were also consistent decreases in participation from communities that historically have over-achieved in MPRs. It can be inferred that increased distrust of government led to apprehension in disclosing personal information more so than previous years. This trend was identified throughout the Bay Area and United States.
- 2) Mailing Misclassifications: Because the census aims to count residents where they are living, Census Questionnaires cannot be sent to P.O. Boxes. Areas that receive mail through P.O. Boxes are hand delivered questionnaires by the US Census Bureau's 'Update/Leave' operation. Much of the mid and south coast should have been classified as part of the Update/Leave operation. However, most of these areas were classified under the regular mail distribution. This resulted in approximately 3,000 undelivered Census Questionnaires. While it is unlikely this misclassification could occur again, the dilemma highlighted the lack of communication between the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Postal Service.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020:

- 1) Partnership with U.S. Postal Service: Increased partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Postal Service would help alleviate mailing dilemmas, as experienced in the mid and south coast. Furthermore, the postal service workers could help identify vacant housing units, spread messaging to their constituents, and ensure all housing units receive a questionnaire.
- 2) Question 8 & 9 on Census Questionnaires: Questions 8 and 9 on the Census Questionnaire inquire about race and ethnicity. The form states, "For this census, Hispanic origins are not races." Feedback from the Hispanic/ Latino community reported that many individuals found the phrasing of this question offensive to point that they refused to participate.

Question 9 inquires about one's race. Over 40% of persons of Hispanic origin selected the 'other' category instead of selecting 'White', 'Black', or 'American Indian' as recommended by the U.S. Census Bureau. Time Magazine published a critical article on this issue, and reported that 95% of all write-ins on the other box indicate Hispanic origin.

Staff recommends the Board issue a letter to the U.S. Census Bureau with the County's suggestion that the next questionnaire in 2020 use more inclusive language.

- 3) Questionnaire Envelope: The questionnaire envelope stated, "Your Response is Required by Law". This message on the front envelope instilled more fear than encouragement. This sentence should be replaced with a statement about the importance of the census and from the benefits of participation.
- 4) Census Coordinator Position: The County's goal for the census was to achieve a complete and accurate count and to spread messaging to approximately 700,000 residents throughout San Mateo County. With such a large task at hand, it was necessary to have a coordinator position to bring all partners together to collaborate on best practices, discuss concerns and problems from within the community, and network with other partners on how to utilize limited resources.

Acceptance of this memo contributes to the shared vision 2025 outcome of a collaborative community by highlighting the county's engagement with its varied partners that ensured the success of the Census 2010 efforts.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no additional fiscal impact from what the Board of Supervisors approved in September of 2009.