

## BE A 2020 CENSUS TRIVIA STAR!

*By Terri Ann Lowenthal*

*Consultant, Funders Census Initiative*

With the 2020 Census on the launch pad (blast off: January 21 in Remote Alaska), census funders and grantees often are front-line sources of information for Complete Count Committees, journalists, civic leaders, and local census partners. That means (to put it bluntly), we should make sure we aren't inadvertently sources of misinformation.

Based on my many years of census-watching (okay, decades, but who's counting), here are a few census facts, long-term and new for 2020, that are often misstated.

- ☑ **The census *does not start on April 1, 2020.*** *That is a reference date only, set by statute, for where people should be counted.* The enumeration starts on January 21<sup>st</sup> in Remote Alaska; most households will receive their materials in mid-March and can respond starting March 12, 2020 (March 9 for telephone responses through Census Questionnaire Assistance lines).
- ☑ **The 2020 Census is *not a "digital census."*** While the Census Bureau encourages on-line response, almost all households can self-respond via internet, telephone, or paper form, or through an in-person interview if they don't self-respond. The Group Quarters and Transitory Location operations will largely be paper-based, as in the past. It is accurate to call 2020 the first "high-tech" or "highly automated" census.
- ☑ **The first mailing is *not a postcard.*** All households in the mail-out universe will receive an envelope with census materials. The *third* and *fifth* mailings (targeted only to homes that haven't yet self-responded) are postcards. Households in Update/Leave areas also will receive a packet of materials, hand-delivered by census employees, with a mailed follow-up letter and then a postcard if they haven't self-responded.
- ☑ **People *cannot obtain a paper questionnaire by calling the Census Bureau.*** Some households (about 20 percent of all housing units in mail-out areas, and all housing units in Update/Leave areas) will receive a paper form in their first packet of census materials. Households that didn't receive a paper form initially and that don't self-respond by mid-April will receive a paper form in the fourth mailing. Paper questionnaires bear a barcode on each page that ties the form to a specific address. Therefore, people cannot request a paper form by calling the Census Bureau (or print one from the internet). But again, ALL households will be given an opportunity to respond using a paper questionnaire if they prefer that method.
- ☑ **The Census Bureau *will not email or text people for the 2020 Census.*** Amplifying this fact will help prevent vulnerable people, such as older Americans, from becoming victims of scams.
- ☑ **The Census Bureau *will publish daily self-response progress reports representing the percent of all known housing units (occupied, vacant, or nonexistent), not people, that have self-responded via internet, telephone, or paper questionnaire.*** The projected national 2020 Census self-response rate is 60.5%. After major field operations are finished, the Census Bureau will publish a "participation rate" (as it was called in 2010) representing the percent of *occupied housing units* that self-responded to the census. Remember, though, that the Census Bureau will "enumerate" all known remaining housing units through an in-person or proxy interview, using federal administrative records, or (if all else fails) using a statistical method called *imputation*. We won't know how many *people* the census counted until the bureau starts releasing data in late 2020!