

Generic Information Collection Request (ICR): Qualitative Research on The Undercount of Young Children

Request: The Census Bureau's Undercount of Young Children Working Group is conducting interviews and focus groups as part of their research to improve coverage of young children in Census Bureau data products. This working group conducts research to investigate the undercount of young children (i.e., children aged zero to four) in the decennial census and federal surveys, as these undercounts can result in biased estimates. The differential undercount of young children across geography and demographics also makes this problem larger for some racial and ethnic groups and some parts of the country. In response to this pervasive issue, the Census Bureau has taken many steps to attempt to understand and reduce this undercount. While there are several quantitative studies to investigate the magnitude of this undercount and identify the demographic characteristics of affected households, little qualitative research has been conducted to identify possible reasons for the undercount. The requested research is intended to help address this research gap.

We plan to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups to better understand why some households do not count young children who should be counted according to the census or household survey's residence rules. Across the currently planned five sites where the 2026 Census Test will take place, we plan to conduct 50 virtual interviews with staff from local organizations that serve households with young children (e.g., health clinics, preschools, day care facilities, etc.). In addition, we will conduct 20 focus groups with household members from households with young children.

This research will be conducted by Census Bureau staff from the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) in collaboration with the Undercount of Young Children Working Group.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative research is to complement quantitative research to improve coverage of young children by learning more about why household members are not counting young children. We plan to conduct this research with participants from all five currently planned 2026 Census Test sites. At each site, we will conduct interviews with staff from local organizations to learn more about the living situations of households with young children that they serve and the potential barriers these household may have to including young children on their response, as well as to explore ideas the local organizations have to encourage households to include young children in their responses.

We will then work with these local organizations as trusted census messengers to recruit householders with young children from the local community for focus groups. The purpose of these focus groups is to learn more about (a) the living situations of households with young children, (b) potential reasons why such households would not participate in the census or

would exclude young children from the census household roster, and (c) potential avenues and messages for encouraging these households to include young children in their response.

This research is not representative research, and the findings will be limited in their generalizability to the population of households with young children. However, the inclusion of local organizations in this research may increase trust of focus group participants to participate in the groups and be transparent with their opinions about the census and their experiences deciding which people to include in a census or survey.

Populations of Interest: Results of this research will be used to help revise methods of enumeration and communication to improve the count of young children in Census data collections and products. Therefore, the interviews will be with staff from local organizations who (a) serve households with young children and (b) will work with the Census Bureau to promote census participation at each site. At each site, we will collaborate with partnership staff from the Census Bureau to identify local organizations for interviews. The focus groups will prioritize households with young children found to have increased likelihood of undercoverage (e.g., households of racial and ethnic minority status, multigenerational households, households with non-relatives, renter households, etc.). The local organizations and Census Bureau partnership staff will also identify locations to conduct focus groups.

Interviews and focus groups will be held in English. We plan to conduct interviews and focus groups in five 2026 Census Test sites. At each site, we will conduct interviews with staff from 10 local organizations and four focus groups with household members of households with young children. The 2026 Census Test site locations are:

- Western Texas
- Tribal Lands in Arizona
- Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Western North Carolina
- Spartanburg, South Carolina
- Huntsville, Alabama

Timeline: Tentative fielding dates are February 2026 through June 2026.

Recruitment: Recruiting for focus groups can be challenging. Potential participants must be willing to contribute to the research and available on a specific night. In addition, to be eligible for focus group, participants should meet four criteria. First, they must live in a housing unit with one or more young children. Second, they should meet quotas for characteristics such as household type, sex, foreign born status, and income to ensure that there is a mix of people within each focus group and increased participation across demographic subgroups. Third, participants will be screened to be at risk for census nonresponse, and eligibility will be contingent upon risk for nonresponse (see screener and eligibility criteria enclosed as

Appendices A and B for more information)*. Finally, participants must have not participated in any other focus group session in the past three months.

Across five 2026 Census Test sites, we will recruit a total of 160 individuals to participate in 20 total focus groups (at eight participants per focus group). Each group will consist of household members of households with one or more young children. Within each group, we will aim for a mix of characteristics such as participants' household type, sex, foreign born status, and income. Focus group participants will be recruited using the help of local organizations who are promoting the census at a 2026 Census Test site. These organizations will be provided with advertisements relevant to the population they work with (see Appendix E). Advertisements will include links to online versions of the screener (see Appendix A), as well as the phone number and email address of the CBSM recruiter if they prefer to respond over the phone.

* While a convenience sample of this size is not intended to be representative of a random sample of the U.S. population, we intend to recruit participants with some demographic heterogeneity. As such, we will be collecting race and ethnicity in the roster part of the testing. Since we are not creating estimates from the race and ethnicity question, a less detailed version is sufficient for the purposes of this study (the collection of demographic information for potential cognitive interview participants, from a convenience sample), while limiting respondent burden. Therefore, we will use the question wording and response options for the race and ethnicity question from Figure 3, rather than the more detailed version in Figure 1.

Method: For the local organization staff interviews, each interview will be 60 minutes long. Prior to the interview, participants will receive digital copies of the informed consent form (enclosed as Appendix D). The interviewer will be available to answer any questions prior to the start of the discussion. Discussion will be semi-structured and aligned with a discussion guide. We have developed a discussion guide for the interviews that covers key topics and identifies areas to probe for further information. Discussions will be facilitated by Census Bureau staff who are professionally trained interviewers with demonstrated expertise in interview facilitation, as well as working with specific audience groups. Participating organizations will not receive an incentive because they are considered part of the research team and their interview participation is part of their occupation.

The topics for interview discussion are as follows:

- Section A: Interview Consent and Introduction (5 min.)
- Section B: General Questions About Serving Households with Young Children (15 min.)
- Section C: Local Organization Engagement with Households with Young Children (10 min.)

- Section D: Households with Young Children's Participation in the Census (25 min.)
- Section E: Conclusion (5 min.)

For the focus groups, each focus group will be about 90 minutes long. Prior to the start of the focus group, participants who submitted an email address during screening will receive digital forms of the focus group consent form (enclosed as Appendix F). If not completed online, the consent form will also be made available at the focus group location for completion before the focus group starts.

A member of the research team will be available to answer any questions prior to the start of the discussion. Discussion will be semi-structured and aligned with a discussion guide. We have developed a discussion guide for the focus groups that covers key topics and identifies areas to probe for further information. Discussions will be facilitated by Census Bureau staff who are professionally trained moderators with demonstrated expertise in focus group facilitation, as well as working with specific audience groups.

The topics for focus group discussion are as follows:

- Section A: Introduction and Icebreaker (10 min.)
- Section B: General Memories of the Census (15 min.)
- Section C: Completing the Census (40 min.)
- Section D: Nonresponse and Concerns About the Census (15 min.)
- Section E: Conclusion (5 min.)

The complete interview and focus group discussion guides are enclosed (see Appendix C and Appendix G), respectively.

Incentives: Due to the hard to recruit nature of the target population, we are requesting that OMB authorize the Census Bureau to approve an incentive amount of \$75 per focus group participant. As previously mentioned, the local organization interview participants will not be paid an incentive.

Enclosures: The following are enclosed:

- Appendix A: Screening questionnaire
- Appendix B: Screening quota tables
- Appendix C: Interview discussion guide
- Appendix D: Interview consent form

- Appendix E: Advertisements
- Appendix F: Focus group consent form
- Appendix G: Focus group discussion guide

Length of Data Collection: The interviews will be 60 minutes. Because Census Bureau partnership staff will refer organizations for interviewing, screening of local organizations will not be required.

Focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes. For each group, we will seat six to eight participants. Thus, the estimated maximum total respondent burden for this study is 453 hours, inclusive of screening and informed consent activities.

BURDEN HOUR COMPUTATION

Table 1. Number of respondents, estimated participation time in minutes, and total burden time in hours for \$75 incentive amount.

| Respondent Type | No. of Respondents | Participation Time per Respondent (minutes) | Total Burden Time (hours) |
|---|--------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Screened Potential Participants | | | |
| Screening | 1280 | 10 | 213 |
| Focus Group Participants | | | |
| Maximum Focus Group Participants | 160 | 90 | 240 |
| Total Burden Hours (Includes Screened Participants and Focus Group Participants) | | | 453 |

Point of Contact: The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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