

MAKING IT COUNT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENSUS 2020 FUND EVALUATION REPORT



JANUARY 2021



BACKGROUND

The U.S. Census serves as a fundamental building block for our democracy, with direct implications for representation at the federal level as well as the allocation of billions of federal dollars for critical public programs. Work has been underway for years in preparation for the 2020 Census to ensure a complete count. Los Angeles County, in particular, is home to some of the most undercounted populations in California, including children ages 0-8, who are considered the hardest-to-count population across all demographics. Of the 16 largest federal programs indexed to the census count, 12 of them directly affect young children and their families. Because young children cannot vote, the census becomes one of the primary ways they can participate in our democracy and have their voices counted for an entire decade.

Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund Grantees



The primary goal of the Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund was to help increase the census count for families with young children by tapping into trusted networks and organizations that have a unique reach to families in LA County.

To bolster census education and outreach efforts to families with young children in LA County, a group of 8 funders¹ joined forces and pooled nearly \$1 million to create the **Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund (ECCF)** in the summer of 2019. Although a commitment to census outreach efforts and investment was underway at a broader state and county level, ECCF drew attention to the need to have a separate, more concerted approach to focusing on the hardest-to-count population. 12 organizations received ECCF grants. These organizations ranged in size, population served, geography, and services in healthcare, education, social services, faith-based, and community organizing.

ECCF's target population and the implementation of peer learning sessions aimed to foster connections and strengthen relationships across grantees. Two virtual learning sessions created space for grantees to share strategies for reaching families with young children, ask questions, and discuss challenges.

The following summary provides key highlights from an evaluation of ECCF conducted by Engage R+D. Learnings from this evaluation are based on interviews with the grantees and managing funders as well as the review of grant reports and observations of funder meetings. For the full report, please visit the LA Partnership's website.

¹The Atlas Family Foundation, Blue Shield of California Foundation, Ballmer Group regranted by California Community Foundation, The Carl & Roberta Deutsch Foundation, First 5 LA, LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, Roth Family Foundation, and The Lawrence Welk Family Foundation





OUTREACH & EDUCATION STRATEGIES

WHAT APPROACHES WORKED WELL



The most effective approaches to engaging families involved a combination of outreach and communication strategies.

Despite the unprecedented challenges during the 2020 Census, grantees demonstrated tremendous resilience, resourcefulness, and creativity with their census outreach and education. According to grantees and funders, it was the combination of strategies, rather than a single strategy, that helped them reach diverse families with young children. Grantees self-reported that, on the whole, they had 33.9 million interactions with families and individuals over the course of the ECCF grant. Key strategies for reaching families included:

-  In-person and virtual convenings and workshops
-  Trusted messengers, outreach ambassadors, and census advocates
-  Phone banking, texting, and canvassing
-  Handouts included as part of supply distributions (e.g., Grab-and-Go)
-  Questionnaire Assistance Centers
-  Social media
-  Mass media (i.e., radio, billboards, online ads)
-  Car caravan

Estimated Interactions with Individuals and Families

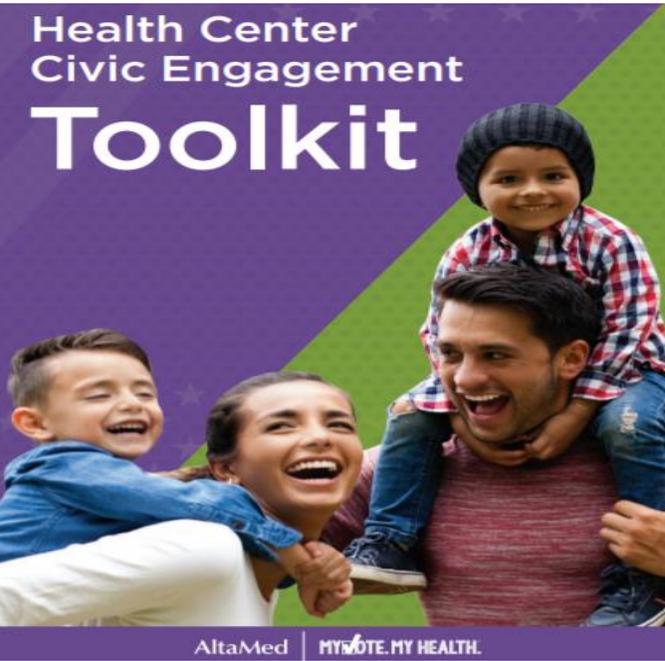
 Digital/Print/Media Outreach 33.6M interactions by 12 organizations	 Phone banking and text messaging 206,458 interactions by 7 organizations
 Community and education workshops 52,055 interactions by 12 organizations	 Questionnaire Assistance Centers 4,395 interactions by 2 organizations
 Train the trainer 3,921 interactions by 8 organizations	 Technical Assistance 2,500 interactions by 4 organizations
 Door to door canvassing 375 interactions by 2 organizations	 Coalition building and volunteer engagement 243 interactions by 5 organizations

The direct connection between the census, healthcare, and educational resources was a particularly critical message for families with young children.

Grantees found an effective method was to shift the script, explaining how the 10-minute census questionnaire will impact children for the next 10 years. They also sought to make their messaging as relevant and personal as possible by “tying in the census with everyday life.” One grantee shared how it seemed to hit home for community members when they learned “where the resources were going to be allocated thanks to the census: for schools, daycares, food stamps, etc.”

As COVID-19 erupted, grantees immediately recognized that connecting the dots “between resources families are relying on during the pandemic and census funding... like WIC, SNAP, CalFresh, and Medicare” really resonated with families. For some families, completing the census was a means of empowerment at a time when people felt particularly powerless. Head to pages 7-10 of the full report to get more information on the strategies and messaging used by grantees.





**BUILDING
CAPACITY & CIVIC
INFRASTRUCTURE**

INTERNAL GROWTH AND SHIFTS



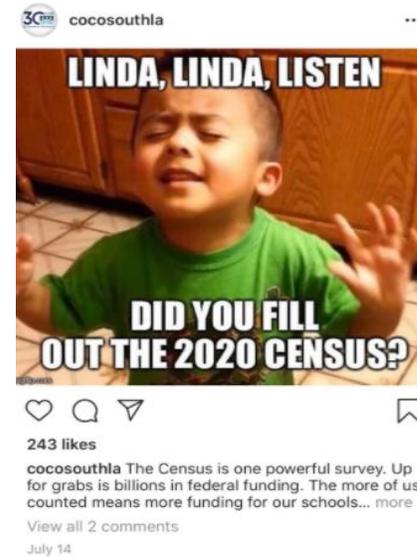
Census outreach became an organization-wide effort that brought agencies together in different ways.

In some larger grantee organizations, staff members shared that prior to their census work, they rarely interfaced with other departments. One grantee shared that their organization “created a census committee. We had at least one or two people from each of our departments join.” They trained key staff members on how to talk about the census and how to respond to challenging questions related to the census in their community. They were also able to partner with others more effectively and efficiently within the organization.

Another agency took a slightly different approach: “For my team, the main thing [was] just having the buy-in from the staff first, talking about the importance about how [the census] impacts us as individuals and as community members. We had a competition going on for making sure as many staff members as possible could actually do it themselves.” This grantee shared that the time they spent educating their team “was the greatest capacity-building process.” The full report takes a closer look at other internal growths and shifts on pages 12-14.

“We're all mission-driven, but this gave us a specific project that we all were invested in and that we all could be a part of. That was beneficial for the agency, especially during the pandemic when we were so separated.”

– ECCF Grantee



“I’ve heard of online organizing, social media, and organizing. It is something new for us because we hardly used it until now, but now all of this has happened, it’s pushing us to another level.”

– ECCF Grantee

Grantees increased their capacity to implement virtual census outreach and organizing strategies.

While the unintended rapid transition to digital organizing was not at the forefront of the agenda for many grantees, COVID-19 drove organizations to examine and build their capacity to connect with their communities in new ways.

Over time, their capacity for digital organizing grew. Organizations that typically engaged in face-to-face grassroots community organizing shifted and shared that they “made tens of thousands of digital impressions across all of our social media platforms.” Some grantees created Instagram pages and parent support groups on Facebook. Others started to connect with their communities on Zoom and Facebook Live. This experience created the opportunity for individuals to learn how to facilitate trainings and conduct outreach using a laptop. One grantee shared that, ultimately, “our capacity has grown over the months for mastering how to outreach digitally to the hard-to-count communities.”



REDEFINING COMMUNITY



The shift to digital outreach and reliance on technology redefined the word “community” for some grantee organizations and allowed them to assess and recalibrate their approach.

As organizations increased their capacity to engage in digital organizing, the meaning of the word “community” shifted. In the map of grantee outreach by zip code, we see darker shades of orange and red (which indicates that multiple organizations have served a zip code) in some communities. While the number of overlapping organizations never exceeded seven (reflected in the dark red shading), it should be noted that through collaboration and this new way of work, shifts are occurring with different implications.

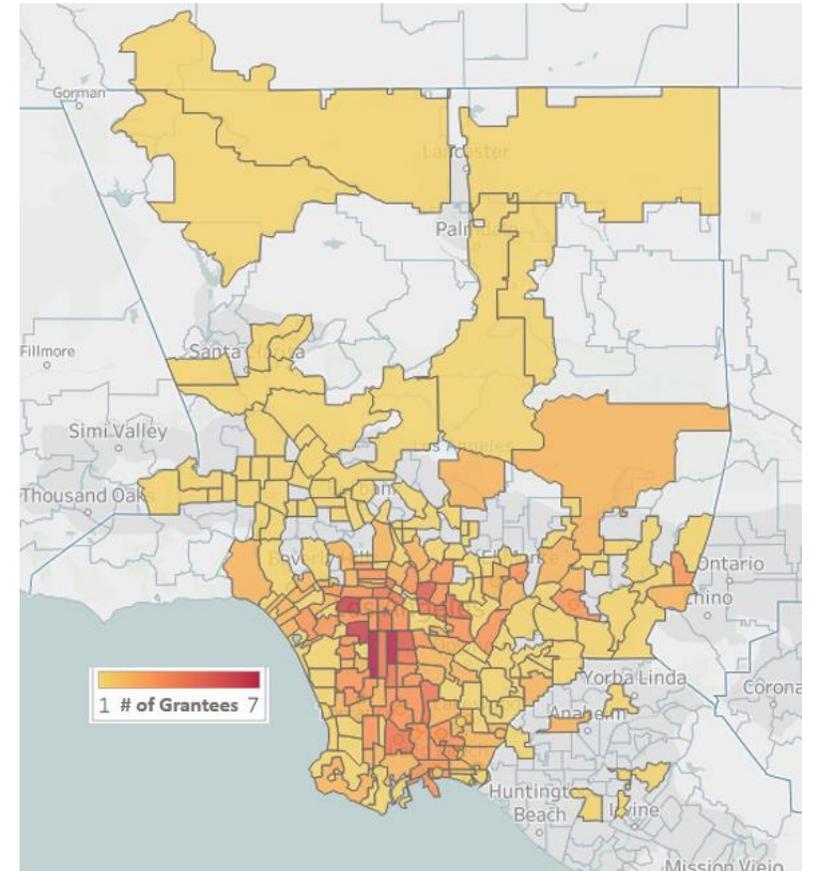
One grantee shared that they learned how to speak and use messaging that identifies people's community based on how they identify themselves. They developed the capacity to construct messaging for Black, LGBTQIA, Latinx, Gen Z, and millennial “communities.” Some grantees found developing this type of knowledge and capacity “very helpful.” Using technology and digital outreach, grantee organizations had the ability to use data to make more strategic decisions. One agency shared, “We now have an ability to analyze both the areas that we're hitting really hard, our service areas. We're going to go back into those areas two or three times with texting.”

Some grantees were also able to construct robust databases with demographic information that can be used to track the residents they contacted. These new tools have increased their efficiency and created the space for them to engage in outreach outside of their defined community. Grantees no longer need to rely solely on traditional door knocks or even phone banking because everything is converging to a digital platform. They now have new ways to spread their message.

“The word community doesn't even mean a geographic location anymore. Community is more of just people you identify with. They may not actually live in your block.”

– ECCF Grantee

Map of Grantee Outreach by Zip Codes





STRENGTHENING NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS

NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS



Grantees made critical new connections that bolstered coordination and the focus on families with young children

Grantees partnered with both ECCF grantees and other organizations to share tactics for coordination, like utilizing others' messaging, sharing outreach scripts and materials in different languages, and coordinating events together. One grantee said working on the Census enabled them to work with already-familiar agencies on a deeper level.

Some grantees said ECCF's focus on families with young children strengthened the quality of their networks and connections. For example, one agency said their work helped influence a larger organization that hadn't considered incorporating a strategy specific to families and children 0-8: "Even though they had a really robust campaign about the census, they actually hadn't focused on counting children at all up until that point. When we had a conversation with them about our work and why it's important, the campaign manager said, 'Well, we want to create a daily goal to do this.'"

"That's one of the bigger pictures of this — we were able to come together, we were able to hit our numbers, [and] we were able to get families with children from birth to five to complete the census. That was all done by communicating with other organizations."

– ECCF Grantee

"Organizations were just in a frantic state of trying to figure things out, so we couldn't find a lot of opportunities to get together and collaborate with them in the way we needed."

**– ECCF Grantee,
on the challenge of networking during COVID-19**

Organizations joined forces to mobilize resources and coordinate strategies to counter the challenges of COVID-19.

Although the pandemic presented challenges to networking and coordination, it also opened opportunities for grantees to explore new ways of working together to mobilize resources during a crisis. One of the most notable efforts was a car caravan that promoted the census in a spirited and safe way to families and children within neighborhoods in East LA. Relationships with other agencies were key to carrying out this new strategy.

COVID-19 also created opportunities for larger organizations with more capacity to support smaller agencies.

For example, one organization with spare capacity for phone and text banking shared that they would help make calls to census tracts in the communities of other organizations that did not have the capacity to implement that strategy. A different agency said they were able to "share best practices with smaller CBOs that probably don't have the capacity or amount of employees that we have." Learn more about what it took for grantees to mobilize networks and connections on pages 15-17 of the full report.





Grantees appreciated the latitude and flexibility of the grant, specifically regarding funds and reporting.

Grantees said that, from day one, the managing funders were responsive and supportive of their needs. The proposal process was described as “reader-friendly” and “easy to do” by one grantee, who acknowledged “a lot of organizations don’t even have the capacity to seek funding” and that ECCF’s approach supported a variety of agencies in responding to the request for proposals.

Relationship-based and rapid-response grantmaking became critical when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Grantees said the managing funders were extremely responsive to grantee needs and appreciated that progress reports were dropped and administrative burdens minimized so that organizations could focus on shifting and pivoting their strategies. Grantees also appreciated that they didn’t have to ask permission to change their strategies and felt the full trust of funders as they adapted their approaches to meet the needs of their communities. The additional grants a few organizations received post-COVID were also lauded by grantees. Pages 18 and 19 of the full report take a closer look at the Fund’s strategy and partnership with grantees.

“Every one of us was on the same page about putting the grantees at the center and understanding that we funded them with trust — they knew what they were doing.”

– Managing Funder

“It was great to see what best practices everyone else was doing to gauge, ‘Am I on the right path here? Am I doing what I can to reach people effectively?’”

– ECCF Grantee, reflecting on the Peer Learning Sessions

Peer Learning sessions fostered connections among grantees, but increased support with networking and coordination was cited as an area for growth.

Grantees reported that learning sessions were valuable and supported their ability to network and coordinate with other agencies. Follow-up surveys revealed that nearly all (96%) participants agreed or strongly agreed that the meetings created safe spaces to share strategies for reaching families with young children, ask questions, and discuss challenges with other ECCF grantees. Given the value grantees attributed to the peer learning sessions, it is not surprising that many grantees said they wished organizations were brought together earlier on and more frequently during the grant period.

Funders also noted that in the future they could be more intentional about supporting networking and sharing of information. One managing funder expressed that they could have strengthened their role as a “network weaver” by connecting ECCF grantees to other “regional hubs” that were doing census outreach and education. Grantees noted that it was challenging to navigate and keep track of the wide range of organizations across LA County doing census work and that it would have been helpful for funders to work with them to make sense of that ecosystem. One suggestion provided by a grantee included email updates or “newsletters” from the managing funders that help synthesize and consolidate information about what’s going on with the census.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS



As funders, community-based organizations, and service providers prepare for future civic and family engagement and census efforts, this evaluation sheds light on a range of key insights and considerations moving forward. Future considerations for the road ahead are detailed on pages 20 and 21 of the full report.

- ❁ **Use a combination of strategies.** This includes embedding outreach and education in regular service activities (e.g., during case management meetings, doctor appointments, etc.)
- ❁ **Leverage community-based trusted messengers.** Whether it is a friend, family member, neighbor, social service or healthcare provider, teacher, or religious leader, people are more receptive to what is being shared and more likely to take action if the source is someone they know and trust.
- ❁ **Create opportunities to connect in person.** Being face-to-face provides an opportunity for deeper engagement and discussion for outreach, education, and training and also makes it easier to complete paperwork on the spot.
- ❁ **Develop varied messaging.** It can take five to seven times to hear a message before feeling compelled to complete the census. As one grantee described it, in a healthcare setting there could be information on the TV in the waiting room, staff wearing census buttons, a flyer provided by the receptionist, posters on the walls, and a conversation with their doctor about the importance of the census.
- ❁ **Make it personal.** It is important to build rapport and connect messaging back to how it will impact their lives on an individual, family, neighborhood, census tract, and county level. The lens of engaging families and children must influence the messaging, tone, and information so it is geared towards families and focused on the importance of counting kids.
- ❁ **Embed census education into programs and activities for children.** This helps bring the message home in new and creative ways (e.g., songs about the census in preschool classrooms, census-related coloring activities, stickers, books, and kid-friendly videos).
- ❁ **Create diverse and inclusive content and materials.** This includes offering information in multiple languages (both spoken and print). It is also important to consider developing graphics representing a range of races and family compositions (e.g., households with single parents, LGBTQIA families, grandparent caregivers, etc.)
- ❁ **Provide training to build capacity and improve efficacy.** Sharing knowledge, answering questions, providing talking points, and developing the skills of providers as well as advocates and volunteers proved to be invaluable for many grantees.





- 🌟 **Support peer learning and “network weaving.”** Opportunities to connect and learn from other grantees as well as funders are highly valued, and organizations want to do it earlier on in the grant cycle and more frequently. Continue to support peer learning sessions, make connections among a cohort of grantees, and share resources that supports grantee partnership. For cohort-based efforts, funders should keep in mind that accepting grant applications on a rolling basis can make it challenging for grantees and funders to quickly launch work together.
- 🌟 **Embrace flexible, responsive, and trust-based giving.** Grantees felt supported and empowered when managing funders adapted grant requirements. Grantees said they were comfortable testing and innovating new strategies because of this mutual trust.
- 🌟 **Expand civic engagement and infrastructure funding.** Grantees that were new to civic engagement work built capacity through this initiative. Funders should continue to reflect on what it means to fund civic engagement work and consider expanding the pool of early childhood grantees that meet criteria.
- 🌟 **Establish process and coordination as part of pooled funding approach.** Pooled funding works best when there are aligned ways of working so grantees can hit the ground running and funders can execute grantmaking strategies in an organized and timely manner.
- 🌟 **Make the connection between similar efforts.** Census outreach is a massive undertaking that involves local, regional, and national players. Grantees said it would be helpful for the Fund to help streamline information, updates, and resources across other census efforts, so everyone is on the same page. A monthly newsletter was suggested as a way to do this.
- 🌟 **Communicate why the census is an important early childhood issue.** Absent the dedicated and intentional focus of Early Childhood Census Fund, engaging families with young children in the census would have looked very different. It is important to continue to help the philanthropic community more deeply understand the connection between the census and the many programs and services the early childhood field cares about.