

SPRING 2019

The Story of North Carolina Counties

# County QUARTERLY

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# Counting our Counties:

## How to Prepare for the 2020 Census

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Every ten years, the number of people living in the United States is counted through a process conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census is a constitutional requirement under Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which states that “Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states... according to their respective numbers...”

This count of people living in the United States, and where they live, determines how the 435 seats

in the U.S. House of Representatives are apportioned to the 50 states. It also impacts how billions of dollars in federal funding are allocated for programs like school lunch funding, Head Start, the Pell Grant program, and highway construction. Census data is also used by local governments and businesses to make informed planning decisions to adapt to the changing needs of the local community.

According to the Census Bureau, the first census was conducted in 1790, and counted 3.9 million people. Since then, the ten-year census has occurred 23 times. Earlier versions were led by U.S. marshals between 1790 and 1870 and later through mailed forms and door-to-door census workers called enumerators. The next decennial census, which takes place on April 1, 2020, will be the first census conducted mostly online.

The 2020 Census will be the first opportunity for people to respond by computer or smartphone, so coordination and awareness, in addition to broadband access, will be vital. The amount of preparation and planning that is necessary to perform the census is significant, and North Carolina and its 100 counties play an important role.

### Census Activities at the State Level

In 2010, the census counted 9.5 million people living in North Carolina, and portions of the state have seen substantial growth over the past ten years. Between 2017 and 2018, North Carolina was one of the ten fastest growing states in terms of both numeric and percentage growth, which, at 1.1 percent outpaced the national population growth of 0.6 percent.

Estimates continue to show the state has gained almost one million people since the 2010 census. If this growth projection is accurate, many expect North Carolina, the 9th most populous state, will gain one additional seat in Congress as a result of shifting population numbers across the country.

Work at the local and state levels to prepare for the census has been underway for years and is ongoing. Last October, Governor Roy Cooper signed an executive order to

establish the N.C. Complete Count Commission to raise awareness and understanding about the 2020 Census and develop partnerships to count particularly hard-to-reach populations. The Commission consists of an appointed body of individuals from various backgrounds, who will meet multiple times over the next year to share information and increase census participation. One of the Commission’s tasks includes partnering with local Complete Count Committees, which are volunteer groups currently being established across the state to raise involvement.

### How Counties Can Help

Multiple stakeholders must work together to make sure that everyone in North Carolina is counted in the 2020 Census. County governments can partner with municipalities, schools, nonprofits, and other groups to create Complete Count Committees and spread the word.

The Census Bureau has already been working with local governments to update their local address files. Under the New Construction Program, counties can register and identify new addresses built after March 2018 that need to be added to the address files.

Here are additional ways counties can get involved with the census effort over the next year:

- Raise awareness about the importance of the census so people in your community know what to expect and remember to respond
- Encourage people to respond online or with a smartphone to easily be counted
- Invite Census liaisons to visit your county and speak to your board or other groups
- Establish or partner with Complete Count Committees or other local and state groups that are working to promote Census 2020

In addition to determining how many members of Congress are apportioned to North Carolina and how billions in certain federal funding is distributed, the data collected by the census is important for counties too. Having accurate, up-to-date information helps local governments better understand who lives in their communities, and by extension, potentially provide better services for residents.

For more information about the 2020 Census and how to participate, visit [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census.html)

For more information about the work going on in North Carolina, visit [census.nc.gov](http://census.nc.gov). ■