

**2010 UNITED STATES CENSUS:
Report on the Queens Complete Count Committee**

**The Honorable Helen M. Marshall
Queens Borough President
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QCC: Introduction & Overview

Queens is the most multi-ethnic county in the United States. As such, the outcome of the 2010 United States Census is of vital importance to the Borough. With a population of close to 2.3 million, Queens would rank seventh were it included among the largest cities in the nation. Queens is the only Borough in New York with an immigrant-born population of close to 50% and where no single racial group predominates.

Borough President Helen Marshall considers the cultural diversity of Queens to be among its greatest assets. At the same time, the Borough President realizes that there are unique challenges involved in conducting an accurate Census count in Queens. Among these challenges are: language barriers, informal housing, families living doubled and tripled up due to the economic recession, housing foreclosures, and concerns among both immigrant and non-immigrant populations about disclosing personal information to government authorities.

The results of the previous decennial Census already reflected these challenges. In 2000, the mail-in response rate (the percentage of households that completed and mailed back the Census form) was 72% for the United States, 66% for New York State, 57% for New York City, and 56% for Queens. Borough President Marshall understood that it was critically important to raise the response rate in Queens: the Census count is more accurate and cost-effective when individuals self-report than when Census enumerators go door-to-door, trying to obtain household information.

Recognizing that 2010 Census rates would determine how much federal funding and representation the diverse communities of Queens would receive for the next decade, Borough President Marshall was determined to make her office a center of information and coordination in the 2010 Census outreach effort. She formed a Queens Complete Count Committee (Queens CCC), to bring together community leaders from around the Borough. As “trusted voices”, they could make the difference in encouraging local residents to complete and return the Census form. The Queens CCC participants reflected the diversity of the Borough: they included civic activists, social service providers, members of the clergy, business owners, educators, and District Managers of the Queens Community Boards.

From November 2009 through April 2010, these leaders exchanged successful outreach strategies to promote effective messaging in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Queens neighborhoods. These included letter-writing campaigns, partnerships on media events, and exchanges of best practices on how to maximize participation even in “hard-to-count” areas. The U.S. Census Bureau and the NYC Census Coordinator’s Office provided essential support to the Queens CCC, as did several non-profit organizations with a tri-state or nationwide focus.

By the end of the six-month organizing period, many participants had developed meaningful relationships with the Community Boards, business people, CUNY campuses, and public officials. They had also come to see the value in continuing their partnerships with other participating community-based organizations around a variety of civic engagement issues.

The Census mail-in response rates, released in the Spring of 2010, were encouraging: 72% for the United States, 67% for New York State, 60% for New York City, and 59% for Queens. In Census tracts within Southeast Queens, the downward trend seen in 1990 and 2000 was reversed, and the 2010 mail-in response rate improved. Considering that this was the first decennial Census conducted since September 11th, 2001, and taking into account the serious concerns about confidentiality expressed, in particular, by many immigrant communities, the fact that the response rate actually *increased* is to be seen as a major accomplishment.

Borough President Helen Marshall commends the U.S. Census Bureau for its extraordinary efforts in updating its outreach strategies and Census form questions in order to be responsive to our increasingly diverse population. Her office has developed strong working relationships with Census Bureau administrators and staff, which she looks forward to maintaining in the years ahead. She also joins with Queens CCC participants in calling attention to ways that the U.S. Census Bureau can partner with the Borough's multi-cultural communities even more effectively in the future.

The following report outlines the structure and activities of the Queens Complete Count Committee, and it concludes with recommendations from Queens CCC participants for the next decennial Census. Attached to the report are a list of Queens CCC participants, Queens CCC meeting agendas, copies of the Letter to the Editor and letter to faith-based leaders that were prepared by the Queens CCC, and 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census response rate maps.

Queens CCC: Structure And Accomplishments

Press Conference

In November 2009, Borough President Helen Marshall held a press conference, where she called upon the culturally diverse communities of Queens to participate in the 2010 U.S. Census and launched her Queens Complete Count Committee. The Borough President was joined by the Reverend Floyd Flake, a former U.S. Congressman, who attested to the importance of U.S. Census figures in allocating federal resources. Additional speakers included Ligia Jaquez, Deputy Regional Director, U.S. Census Bureau; Stacey Cumberbatch, NYC 2010 Census Coordinator; SJ Jung, President of the MinKwon Center for Community Action in Flushing; and Ana Maria Archila, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York. The press conference was attended by diverse community leaders, a number of whom were already engaged in Census outreach. The majority of these leaders joined the Queens CCC and attended the meetings.

Subcommittees

The Queens CCC met, and also communicated via email and phone, on a regular basis for six months. The meetings were coordinated and chaired by Borough President Marshall's Special Assistant on Immigrant & Inter-cultural Affairs, Susie Tanenbaum. NYC 2010 Census Assistant Deputy Coordinator Anne Montesano provided indispensable advice and was actively involved in framing the meeting goals throughout this period. The U.S. Census Bureau's Partnership Coordinator Jamal Baksh and Queens Team Leader Modesto Romero provided technical assistance and furnished ample promotional materials

for the meetings. During the first few months, attendance totaled 50 – 75 people; to ensure that everyone was engaged in the discussions, the group divided into the following subcommittees:

- Business outreach
- Faith-based outreach
- Health care provider outreach
- Media outreach
- Undercounted outreach

In each subcommittee, one to two participants assumed the role of chair. The Faith-based and Media subcommittees proved to be the most active. Two tangible outcomes from these subcommittees were:

- A Letter to the Editor about the importance of the 2010 Census to Queens, co-signed by Borough President Helen Marshall and the Queens CCC, which was distributed to local and ethnic newspapers;
- A mailing to over 200 Queens-based faith leaders, containing a letter co-signed by Borough President Helen Marshall and the Queens CCC, as well as materials that they could incorporate into their winter holiday sermons to promote the 2010 U.S. Census.

Effective messaging

By early 2010, attendance at the meetings had dropped off (average: 35 people), which actually made it possible to address key issues as a full group. Meanwhile, email blasts were sent to a list of over 250 community leaders, containing information that they could use in their respective Queens neighborhoods.

Effective messaging became a major focus of the Queens CCC. This meant finding culturally appropriate ways to explain to individuals why their participation in the Census would be critically important, and also assuring them that their responses would be kept confidential. Special guests were invited to the meeting to address this topic and to share resources. Among them were Norman Eng, Director of Media Relations at The New York Immigration Coalition, and Jehangir Khattak, Communications Manager at the New York Community Media Alliance.

At every meeting, diverse participants were asked to report on strategies being implemented by their organizations or coalitions. Here are a few examples:

- Adhikaar: Initiated a phone tree project and held a press conference in the Nepalese community of Elmhurst – Jackson Heights.
- Community Board 7: Prepared a Census mailing, and held a Census press conference with local Asian media outlets.
- Community Board 13: Dedicated an entire Board meeting to the 2010 Census.
- Korean American Census Task Force: Produced a DVD on the Census for distribution to Korean churches.
- MinKwon Center for Community Action: Integrated Census materials into the organization's existing programs; tabled at neighborhood events; established a Census hotline in their office in English & Korean; planned a phone-banking and door-knocking campaign; partnered with AAFE on a Census rally in Flushing.

- New Americans Program, Queens Library: Hosted a Census program with AAFE, to reach out to a cross-section of Chinese-speaking residents.
- NICE (New Immigrant Community Empowerment): Conducted grassroots training on street outreach; produced radio announcements; organized a televised event in Jackson Heights; made a Census presentation on the bus ride to an Immigrant Reform Rally in Washington, D.C.
- Queens Jewish Community Council: Held a Census summit in the Bukharian Jewish community of Rego Park – Forest Hills; handed out Census materials at a pre-Passover food distribution event.
- South Asian Task Force: Organized a Census training for faith leaders, focusing on the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities.

Through this reporting, participants received feedback and acquired new strategies. For instance, Cynthia Zalisky of the Queens Jewish Community Council announced that her organization would adopt a strategy described by SJ Jung of the MinKwon Center for Community Action. Narbada Chhetri's phone tree project in the Nepalese community drew applause from the entire Queens CCC.

March Kick-off Press Event

Borough President Helen Marshall held a press event to announce that the Census form would be arriving in mailboxes, and to remind Queens residents to complete and return it. The U.S. Census Bureau's Assistant Regional Manager, Patricia Valle, joined the Borough President for this event. After observing the cultural diversity in the Queens CCC and listening to the reporting-back session, Ms. Valle felt confident that the 2010 Census outreach effort in Queens would be a great success.

Queens CCC: Reflections and Recommendations

In March and April, many Queens CCC participating organizations served as Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be-Counted Sites; set up multi-lingual phone hotlines in their offices; conducted phone banks, door-knocking, and street outreach; held rallies and press events; and promoted messages through media outlets. We waited to hold a final Queens CCC meeting in early May.

At the May meeting, Anne Montesano of the NYC 2010 U.S. Census Coordinator's Office congratulated Queens on having a higher mail-in response rate in 2010 than in 2000. Modesto Romero of the U.S. Census Bureau explained the next phase in the process, namely, the Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) initiative.

Queens CCC participants reported on their Census outreach activities of the previous two months. They reflected on their accomplishments as well as on the challenges they had faced. The vast majority of participants stated that devoting time and resources to Census outreach had been a positive experience. They felt, moreover, that the relationships they had established with other community-based organizations would serve as the basis of collaborations around voter registration and civic engagement initiatives in the future.

The participants also expressed frustration about specific aspects of their interactions with the U.S. Census Bureau, and they offered recommendations for the next decennial Census. These were among their comments:

Improve Communication with Stakeholders

- *Community presentations:* Partnership Specialists should tailor these presentations, and elaborate on the points raised in the general power point, so that they are more relevant to the specific audience being addressed.
- *Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be-Counted Sites:* Clarify whether the sites can engage their own volunteers or whether the U.S. Census Bureau is providing the staffing. There was considerable confusion around this point.
- *Enumerator training sessions:* Make sure that the training coordinators communicate with the host sites. Several Community Board offices waited for hours or days to host training groups, but the groups did not show up or had significantly different enrollments/hours than projected.
- *Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU):* Clarify from the beginning that even individuals who complete and mail their Census forms may be visited by Census enumerators. Queens CCC participants were exasperated to learn that, after promising respondents that no one would come to their doors, they were in fact mistaken. They felt this misinformation undermined their credibility in their own communities.

Increase Access to Census Forms

- *Stocking forms:* Make sure there are enough forms at Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be-Counted Sites. Some Queens CCC participants reported that their sites had run out of forms and the U.S. Census Bureau failed to provide more. These were missed opportunities to increase the Borough's mail-in response rate.
- *Access to forms:* More work needs to be done to ensure that tenants in multiple dwellings and illegally converted housing see the form and have the opportunity to respond.

Expand Language Access and Cultural Competency

- *Linguistic and cultural competency:* Hire staff for Questionnaire Assistance Centers who speak the language and who share the culture of the surrounding community. Queens CCC participants said that their community members had taken the Census test and gotten high scores but were never called back. A few participants complained that the staff sent to their sites either spoke the language but were unfamiliar with the culture, or "looked like" their community members but spoke another language altogether.
- *Form completion:* The U.S. Census Bureau's Questionnaire Assistance Center staff should not be advising respondents on issues of identity. One Queens CCC participant found that Bangladeshi respondents were being told to check off "Asian Indian" (i.e. a different nationality).
- *Language access:* In a county as multi-ethnic and multi-lingual as Queens, provide door hangers to the enumerators in more languages than just English and Spanish. Otherwise, recent immigrants who speak other languages will assume that the message is not intended for them.

Queens Borough President Helen Marshall appreciates the enormity of the task undertaken by the U.S. Census Bureau. She commends its leadership and staff for the extraordinary amount of work that was conducted before and during the 2010 Census to maximize success even in hard-to-count areas. Borough President Marshall built a strong working relationship with the U.S. Census Bureau during this process; she looks forward to maintaining clear lines of communication as the 2010 Census data is released and analyzed in the months and years ahead. She is also indebted to the staff of the NYC 2010 Census Office, whose knowledge and support helped to maximize response rates throughout the Borough and City.

In Borough President Marshall's view, the Queens Complete Count Committee played an indispensable leadership role in bringing stakeholders together and in mobilizing resources to ensure that community members would be counted in the 2010 U.S. Census. The Queens CCC united a diverse group of participants who, with help from experts in the field, looked at the data from the previous decennial Census; developed innovative strategies to encourage hard-to-count populations to respond; and addressed critical barriers such as language access through a wide range of community-based activities. Borough President Marshall is convinced that, without the existence of the Queens CCC and the grassroots efforts of its participants, Census response rates would not have increased the way they did in a county as multi-ethnic and multi-lingual as Queens.

Many members of the Queens CCC concur with the Borough President. Seema Agnani of the South Asian Task Force believes that the 2010 U.S. Census was a vast improvement over previous counts. Julissa Gutierrez of NALEO Educational Fund encourages Queens CCC participants to communicate with the U.S. Census Bureau in the coming years, to contribute to further improvements between now and the next decennial Census. It is in this spirit of ongoing cooperation that our report has been prepared.

Attached to this report are:

- Queens CCC's list of participants
- Queens CCC's meeting agendas
- Letter to the Editor
- Letter to Queens faith-based leaders
- Response rate maps from the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census counts