

Rapid Response Data Briefing

2026 Census Test

February 23, 2026



DATA INDEX . US

FAIR  COUNT

apdu

 PRB

**THE
CENSUS
PROJECT**

Speakers

Dr. Rachel Cortes, Chief Demographer, Claritas

Mary Jo Mitchell, Co-Director, The Census Project

Meeta Anand, Senior Director of Census & Data Equity, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean, President, Fair Count

Meghan Maury, Former Senior Advisor to the Director of the Census Bureau

Beth Jarosz, Vice President, Association of Public Data Users (moderator)



DATA INDEX . US

FAIR COUNT



THE
CENSUS
PROJECT

What is the 2026 Census Operational Test?

A large-scale simulation of census operations to evaluate procedures, systems, and workflows under realistic conditions

What It Covers

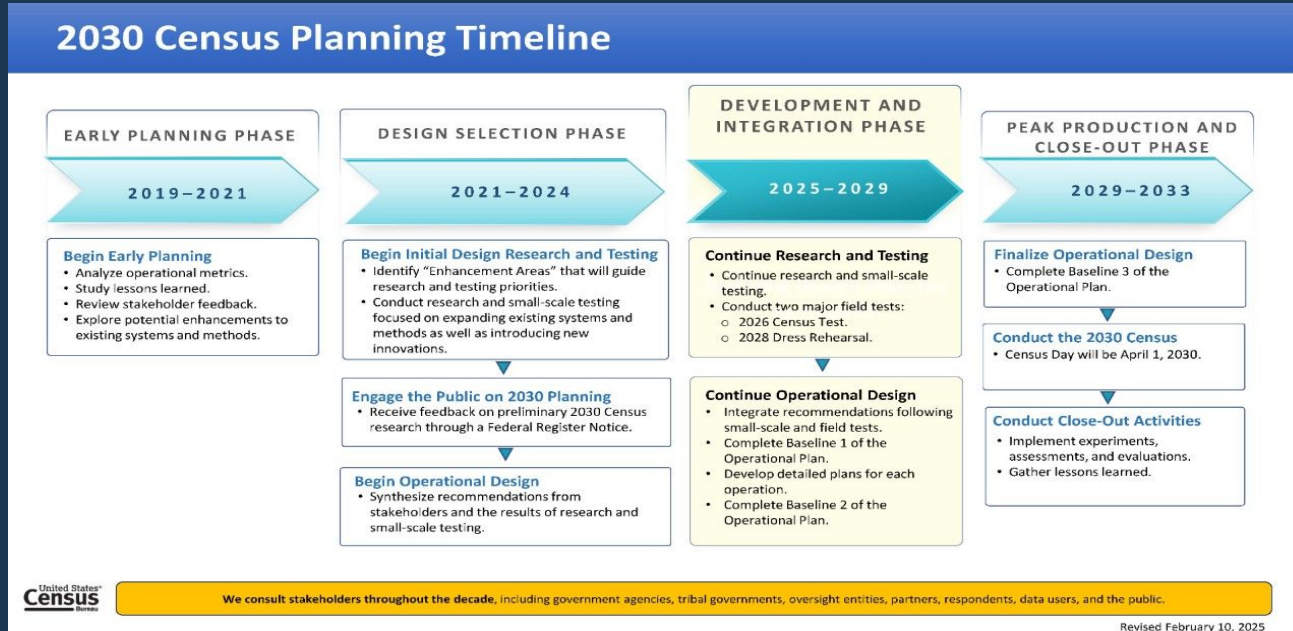
- Self-response operations
- In-field enumeration
- Group Quarters enumeration
- Communication, partnerships, and engagement
- Integrated, near real-time response processing
- Enhancements to address historically undercounted and hard-to-count populations

How it Runs

- Focuses on testing new and improved approaches
- Assesses whether proposed changes are feasible
- Combines key functions into a single test
- Conducted in selected sites
- Leads to full “dress rehearsal”

Why the 2026 Census Test is Important

Decennial census is the U.S. government's largest peacetime civilian operation.



Why the 2026 Census Test is Important

- Crucial preparatory step for the 2030 Census.
- Opportunity to:
 - Evaluate new methodologies aimed at improving count accuracy, especially for historically undercounted populations.
 - Assess self response options and improve in-person data collection methods.
 - Test was planned for six geographically and demographically diverse sites.
- Investing in preparations NOW reduces risk of requiring unplanned, additional funding in peak years at the end of the decade.

Why the 2026 Census Test is Important

Curtailing Plans Has Consequences for Data Quality

- In ramp up to 2020 Census, largely due to budget uncertainty, the Census Bureau canceled two of its three field tests, eliminating sites in rural and suburban locations.
- High undercount of Latinos, Native Americans on reservations, Black communities, and young children (0-5) in the 2020 Census attributable, in part, to the cancellation of these tests.

2025 Announcement vs Current FRN

2025 Announcement:

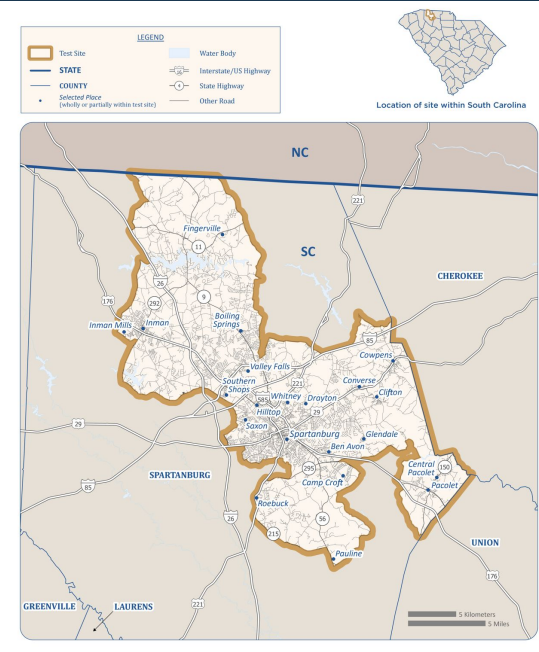
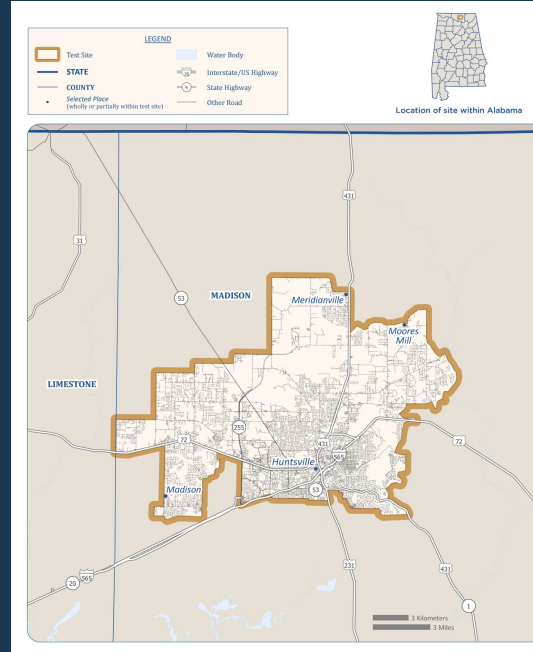
- Test sites:
 - Western Texas
 - Tribal Lands in Arizona
 - Colorado Springs
 - Western North Carolina
 - Spartanburg, SC
 - Huntsville, AL
- Languages:
 - English
 - Spanish
 - Chinese
- Questionnaire format:
 - Census 2020 format
- Response and Collection:
 - Internet self-response
 - Phone-based assistance
 - Paper Questionnaires

Current FRN:

- Tests sites:
 - Spartanburg, SC
 - Huntsville, AL
- Languages:
 - English-only
- Questionnaire format:
 - Re-ordered ACS form (incl. citizenship question)
- Response and collection:
 - USPS doing in-field enumeration
 - No national sample
 - No group quarters component

2026 Census Test Issues

- 2 Test Sites
 - South Carolina and Alabama
- Internet self-response only
- English-only forms
- USPS enumerators
 - Cost
 - Quality
 - Privacy implications
- No message testing or community outreach
- No questionnaire assistance



Reduction in Test Sites

Summary of Sites Selected

TEST SITE CRITERIA	DENVER REGION			ATLANTA REGION		
	Western Texas	Tribal Lands Within Arizona*	Colorado Springs, CO	Western North Carolina	Spartanburg, SC	Huntsville, AL
GEOGRAPHY						
✓ Rural area with historically undercounted populations and lower self-response rates	X	X		X		
✓ Area with a colonia	X					
✓ Tribal area		X		X		
✓ Area with nonmailable addresses	X	X		X		
LIVING QUARTERS						
✓ Seasonally vacant housing	X			X		
✓ Complex housing units			X	X	X	X
✓ High instances of new construction			X			
✓ Multiunit structures and/or hidden housing units			X	X	X	X
✓ Wide range of group quarters types			X	X	X	X
STAFFING						
✓ Recruiting field staff has been historically challenging						X
✓ Low unemployment						X
TECHNICAL						
✓ Little to no cell phone or internet service	X			X		
✓ Comprehensive and minimal administrative record data			X			

* Selected tribal reservations.

Note: This table summarizes how testing requirements are distributed across the six test sites. These locations provide optimal opportunities for us to implement all of the changes and enhancements we have planned for the test. Updated November 13, 2024, to reflect the level of seasonally vacant housing in Tribal Lands Within Arizona does not meet the criteria.

How you can support this essential step toward the 2030 Census tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-FRN

Needs and Uses: The 2026 Operational Test in Support of the 2030 Census (hereafter, “Test”) is an American Community Survey (ACS) test using the ACS Methods Panel that is planned to help the Census Bureau prepare for the 2030 Census. The Test is not an end-to-end test of all operational work. Instead, it is a scaled-down version with appropriate adjustments of the selected aspects of the census. The Test will be conducted in two test sites—Spartanburg, SC and Huntsville, AL—which allows for testing in real world situations and on a larger scale than research simulations allow. The Test will test the viability of new and revamped systems and methods researched and developed for the census; to identify, document, and address potential challenges. Additionally, the Test will evaluate and assess the use of United States Postal Service (USPS) staff to increase efficiency in various capacities typically performed by temporary Census Bureau field workers. Some decisions, including names of operations and workload estimates for those operations, have yet to be made; however, at this time, the Census Bureau can present aspects of the test that affect the public.



DATA INDEX . US

FAIR COUNT



THE
CENSUS
PROJECT

You Can Sign On to Letters. (Plural.)

Groups are submitting comment letters that offer the opportunity to sign on.

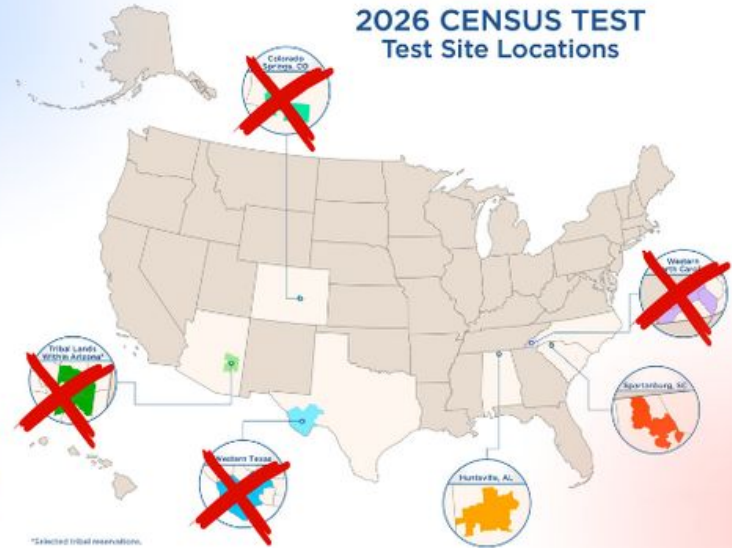
1. Population Association of America
 - a. Monday, March 2, by 5:30pm ET, accepting organizations, not individuals
2. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
 - a. Wednesday, March 4, by 5:30pm ET, accepting organizations, not individuals
3. Census Quality Reinforcement Task Force
 - a. Wednesday, March 4, by 5:30pm ET, accepting organizations and individuals

To Learn More, tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-Briefing



VIRTUAL BRIEFING
2026 Census Test:
Changes and Implications
for the 2030 Census

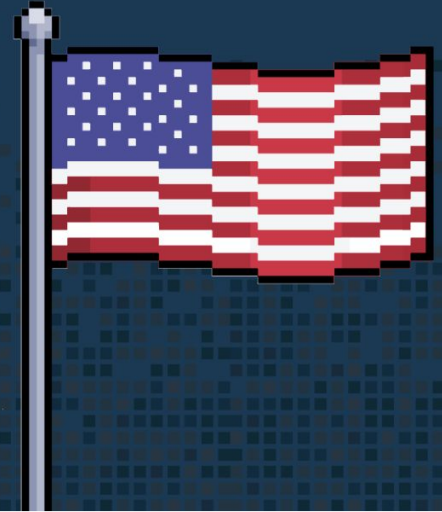
Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2026 @ 4:00 - 5:00pm ET



For Early Warnings on Changes, Follow and Subscribe to dataindex.us

America's Data Index

Monitoring America's federal data infrastructure from dataset availability and new releases to planned and unplanned changes to collections.



To Keep Up to Date, Join the Federal Data Forum

federaldataforum.prb.org

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Federal Data Forum. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'FDF Home', 'Discussion', 'Blogs', 'Events', and 'Member Directory'. A search bar and a 'Log in' button are also present. The main header area features the text 'FDF Home' over a dark green background with a mountain silhouette. Below this, the 'Latest Discussions List' is displayed, including a dropdown menu set to 'Most Recent'. Two discussion entries are visible: one by Mark Mather about the September release of CPS ASEC data, and another by James Jacobs about a new book on preserving government information. To the right, there are two sidebars: 'Community Quick Links' with links to 'Community FAQs' and 'Data Resources', and 'Community Events List' featuring two upcoming events: 'Rapid Response Data Briefing: American Time Use Survey' on July 9 and 'Association of Public Data Users' unConference 2025' on July 22.

FEDERAL DATA FORUM FDF Home Discussion Blogs Events Member Directory Log in

FDF Home

Latest Discussions List

Most Recent

MM **RE: September Release of CPS ASEC**
By: [Mark Mather](#), 23 hours ago
Posted in: [Federal Data Users](#)

Hi Flo, I'm hoping the Census Bureau will announce their release schedule for the 2024 income, poverty, and health insurance data in the next couple of weeks. Last year, this information was posted on July 16: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/schedule-income-poverty-acs.html> ...

JJ **new book "Preserving government information: past, ...**
By: [James Jacobs](#), 23 hours ago

Community Quick Links

- ? Community FAQs
- Data Resources

Community Events List

- JUL 9** **Rapid Response Data Briefing: American Time Use Survey**
Online
- JUL 22** **Association of Public Data Users' unConference 2025**
Online

Take Action

Submit comments to
tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-FRN

Submit signatures to sign-on letters

- tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-Sign-On-PAA
- tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-Sign-On-LC
- tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-Sign-On-COR

Register for the virtual briefing at
tinyurl.com/2026-Census-Test-Briefing

Check out dataindex.us

Check out federaldataforum.prb.org



Respond by 3/5/2026