



## The 2020 Census holds special importance, challenges for rural communities

*The time is now to get ready*

A message from Blandin Foundation president and CEO Kathleen Annette



America's decennial (every-ten-year) Census is intended to be a complete count of everyone in the country, but people in rural places often are under-counted and, thus, under-represented. Rural leaders can be getting ready now so that all people are counted in April 2020.

Blandin Foundation and I have increased our involvement in planning for the Census because it can have big impacts for Minnesota's rural communities, such as:

- Allocation of political power through reapportionment of seats in Congress and drawing of new legislative districts (and Minnesota is at real risk of losing a seat)
- Distribution of federal funds through funding formulas (thousands of dollars per person)
- Civil rights enforcement through fair housing laws, the Voting Rights Act, and other legislation
- Business site selection when companies are deciding where to expand, where to bring their jobs
- Community planning for schools and hospitals.

### Historically under-represented

Rural communities with high levels of poverty, as well as Native Americans living on reservations, are traditionally undercounted, say both the Minnesota Demographer's Office and the U.S. Census Bureau. And these are communities and people that can benefit *most* from being counted.

We can--and must--do better with the 2020 Census. Here are some ideas...

1. Local groups—from community volunteers to government officials—can get organized now so that they are ready, because every person matters. Resources for forming a local Complete Count Committee, a group of government and community leaders who promote and encourage response to the 2020 Census in their communities, are online here: <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/census2020/ccc/>
2. For the first time, Governor Dayton has formed a state-wide Minnesota Complete Count Committee and has asked that I participate as one of its founding co-chairs. The work to oversee the state approach to the Census launched in July and I am honored to be one of its leaders. I invite your ideas and concerns as the

statewide Complete Count Committee does it work. Feel free to email me at [Kathy.Annette@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:Kathy.Annette@blandinfoundation.org).

3. Please watch for, and engage with, two initiatives in which Blandin Foundation is particularly involved. The first is the [Minnesota Census Mobilization Partnership](#), which is working to anticipate and address barriers that make it hard or feel unsafe for every person in Minnesota to participate in the 2020 Census. The second is to [keep working on broadband access and use](#) in our rural communities—the Census will primarily be online this time, although there will be paper and door-to-door follow-up in some areas.

#### Last-minute curve ball that must be reversed

Because of its high importance and complexities, what actually appears on the Census form is very important. Just as things were about to get rolling with the 2020 Census, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross inserted a question about citizenship that we believe puts at risk a complete and fair count.

Blandin Foundation and many others in Minnesota and across the nation have asked the agency to remove this new question, which asks for a person's citizenship status. In our comments to the Department of Commerce, I said...

*Thousands of people across the country are gearing up for a complete count in 2020. The addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census, however, will work against efforts for a full and fair count.*

*I know personally, based on conversations I have had throughout rural Minnesota, that the very persons who are traditionally undercounted will be further driven from participation in the 2020 Census out of fear and mistrust should the proposed citizenship question continue.*

#### We stand with you

The ways in which rural peoples and communities show up in the 2020 Census will affect us for decades to come. On behalf of Blandin Foundation, we look forward to partnering with rural communities and their leaders on a full and fair 2020 Census! We have created a section of our website with various resources as a start (<https://blandinfoundation.org/learn/research-rural/census-2020/>).

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathleen Annette

President and CEO, Blandin Foundation