

MAKING IT COUNT: BUILDING CAPACITIES AND CONNECTIONS TO COUNT KIDS IN LOS ANGELES

A summary of learnings from the Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund Evaluation

January 2021





Contents

Introduction	2
Key Takeaways	2
Outreach and Education Strategies	2
Building Capacity and Civic Infrastructure	2
Networks and Connections	2
The Funder-Grantee Partnership	2
The Road Ahead	2
Data Appendix	2

Introduction

"We were concerned that the one population that actually crosses every single hard-to-count population, which is young children, was going to get missed."

- Funder of the Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund

2020 was a year unlike any other, and, despite many unforeseen events, one was highly anticipated — the 2020 Census. Widespread investments of time and money were made across the country to ensure that every resident would be counted. This report highlights the work of funders and community-based organizations that partnered to promote census participation among families with young children in Los Angeles County. Lessons learned from this work have implications for both funders and service providers that seek to strengthen partnerships, deepen engagement with communities, and advance future civic engagement efforts.



At a high level, the U.S. Census serves as a fundamental building block of 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. The 2020 Census faced unique barriers early on, including the shift to a largely untested online platform and the concerns created by a proposed citizenship question. Despite being blocked by the Supreme Court, the question spawned rhetoric which created fear and confusion that rippled through communities.

The census remained top of mind for many people as the nation entered 2020. However, the country was thrown a curveball weeks before the official census launch day on

April 1st. California's Governor Newsom issued a statewide stay-at-home order on March 19th in an effort to stem the rising tide of COVID-19, and the U.S. Census Bureau simultaneously announced the suspension of its field operations over health concerns. In addition to alarm about the pandemic, concerns mounted regarding census outreach efforts to millions of Californians. Last-minute changes to census counting and reporting timelines added another layer of disarray to an already turbulent process.

Before these disruptions, work had been underway for years in preparation for the 2020 Census to ensure a complete count. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the 2020 Census could have missed more than 1.6 million

California residents without concerted efforts to reach hard-to-count populations and immigrant communities. Los Angeles County is home to the most undercounted population groups in the state. One of the hardest-to-count populations across all demographics is children ages 0-8. 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.

Of the 16 largest federal programs indexed to the census count, 12 of them directly affect young children and their families. In fact, these 16 programs alone will account for over \$76B in annual revenue for California.

¹ https://www.ppic.org/publication/californians-and-the-2020-census/

The Early Childhood 2020 Census Fund

Although a commitment to census outreach efforts and investment was underway at a broader state and county level, the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment drew attention to the need to have a separate, more concerted approach to focusing on the hardest-to-count population. In an effort to bolster census education and outreach efforts to families with young children in Los Angeles County, a group of 8 funders² joined forces and pooled nearly \$1 million in funding to create the Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund (ECCF) in the summer of 2019. 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. While pooled funding is not a new or unique model, this is the first time eight funders have come together in the region to specifically support census outreach to this undercounted population. To optimize decisions and grantmaking, the group identified three organizations as "managing funders" to direct the work. This approach allowed the group to be nimble and responsive.

The Fund understood that advancing the interests of families with young children and supporting their engagement in the census would require strong relationships among grantees and their partners. 13 organizations (shown on the right) received ECCF 2020 grants. These organizations range in size, population served, geographical focus, and services offered. Grantees' efforts span

Early Childhood Census 2020 Fund Grantees

























fields like healthcare, faith, education, social services, and community organizing. In addition to directing resources to bolster the count of young children aged 0-8 in the 2020 census, the Fund also saw the census as an opportunity to bolster the long-term civic engagement capacity of communities and organizations serving families with young children. Grants were awarded to agencies in three phases that aligned with distinct grantmaking strategies connected to the census:



Phase 1
2 - 3 Awards up to \$75,000 each

July - October 2019

Grantmaking Strategy:

Community education efforts, including communications and translation



Phase 2 5 - 10 Awards up to \$50,000 each

Fall 2019 - April 2020

Grantmaking Strategy: Outreach and education for Get Out the Count



Phase 3
3 - 5 Awards up to

May - July 2020

Grantmaking Strategy: "Boots on the ground" outreach directly connected to the Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) period

While all grantees had experience working with families with young children, organizations said ECCF's dedicated funding for outreach to families with young children inspired them to pursue strategies and tactics that they wouldn't have otherwise explored. One agency that was involved in outreach for the 2010 Census said that last time, "There wasn't a focus on making sure that families with kids at that young age were reported," and that not a lot of organizations, even with larger grants, focused on this. Other grantees said focusing on a specific audience forced them to be disciplined and intentional in their approach, and that "we didn't lose sight that we needed to focus on that very critical 0-8 population...we made sure we were thinking about that population in every aspect of our outreach."

² The 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

About This Report

This report provides key highlights from the evaluation of ECCF conducted by Engage R+D designed to:

- Assess the type, nature, and effectiveness of outreach strategies focused on families with children aged 0-8
- Document promising strategies and tactics to reach this hardto-count population, particularly in light of the disruption caused by COVID-19
- Explore the contributions and implications of census outreach for building grantees' capacity for other types of community and civic engagement work, including technical capacities and network building
- Highlight lessons learned from grantees as well as the funder's rapid-response strategy and approach to decisionmaking
- Document how this work has evolved over time, including what the work looked like before COVID-19, the impacts of COVID-19, and how both funders and grantees shifted in response to the crisis

Evaluation Methods and Activities*

Grantee interviews (n=12). 60-minute phone/video interviews with 3-5 staff from each grantee organization.

Grantee learning sessions (n=2). Virtual peer learning meetings to spark conversation about the work and follow-up surveys to gather feedback.

Managing funder focus group (n=1). 90-minute focus group with managing funders.

Observation of funder meetings (n=3). Non-participant observation of funder meetings.

Grant report review (n=12). Review of final grant reports.

The evaluation leveraged methods and data sources (see table above) that provided a rich mixture of information from multiple perspectives. In alignment with the goals of ECCF, the findings from this evaluation are presented in the following sections:

- Key Takeaways
- Outreach and Education Strategies
- Building Capacity and Civic Infrastructure
- Networks and Coordination
- The Funder-Grantee Partnership
- The Road Ahead

This report zeroes in on the efforts to increase enumeration of a specific population, but there was also a broader "We Count LA" campaign underway in Los Angeles County led by the California Community Foundation and its partners that included multiple communities and organizations. Learnings from that effort, as well as from the work done at the state level, were tracked through different yet coordinated evaluations. This report sheds light on one piece of the wider picture of 2020 census outreach and education efforts within California.

Key Takeaways

As funders, community-based organizations, and service providers prepare for future civic engagement and census efforts, this evaluation sheds light on a range of key insights and considerations moving forward.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

- 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 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, not only for outreach, education, and training but also to more easily 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, in a healthcare setting there could be information on the TV, pamphlets in the waiting room, staff wearing census buttons, a flyer provided by the receptionist, posters on the walls, and a conversation with the doctor about the importance of the census.
- Make it personal. It is important to build rapport and connect messaging back to how the census will impact people's lives on an individual, family, neighborhood, census tract, and county level.
- 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.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUNDERS

- Support peer learning and "network-weaving."

 Opportunities to connect and learn from other grantees and funders are highly valued, and organizations want to do so 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 support 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 those criteria.
- Establish process and coordination as part of pooled funding approach. Pooled funding works best when there are aligned ways of working so that grantees can hit the ground running and funders can execute grantmaking strategies in an organized and timely manner.
- Make connections among 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 that 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. 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.

Outreach and Education Strategies

Grantees proved to be adaptive, agile, and resourceful as they doubled down on census outreach and education amidst the turbulence of 2020. Communities were already reeling from the pandemic as grantees tried to ensure they completed the census, and then tragedy struck yet again on May 25th when police killed George Floyd. Many grantees slowed outreach and engagement during June to be "respectful of the Black Lives Movement that's happening across the country," as one grantee explained. Another grantee said they wanted to give "distance and let people process some bigger picture issues that were going on."

Despite facing numerous challenges that required incredible perseverance, grantees were resilient and explored opportunities to be innovative and creative with their approaches. Interviews with grantees explored what outreach strategies were most effective, what messaging was used to communicate the importance of the census to families with young children, and the biggest challenges organizations faced over the course of the grant.

Distrust of government, concerns about data privacy, and messaging fatigue posed the biggest roadblocks to census participation.

Myths about how census data will be used and distrust of government was a considerable impediment, particularly for undocumented populations. Grantees recounted that one of the biggest barriers to families filling out the census included overcoming their fear of confidentiality issues and the citizenship question. "It just confirmed how much our trusted messenger role is impactful to our community, because there was so much distrust of government," shared a grantee.

"[Hundreds of census advocates]
had the same issue come
up...community members were
hesitant, and it was fear [of how
their data was going to be used]."

- ECCF Grantee

One strategy an organization used to quell fears was to print copies of the census questions and bring them to workshops so they could go over each question and show that the citizenship question was not included. Another

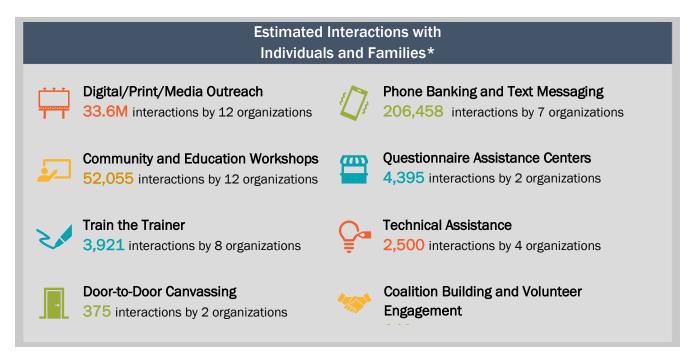
grantee found that they had to continually reiterate through phone calls, flyers, and other trusted messengers that it is completely illegal to share personal information gathered from the census and that participants' census information would never be made public.

Another challenge that was flagged at grantee learning sessions as well as during the interviews was the issue of messaging fatigue that community members were experiencing. Grantees discussed the delicate balance between getting the message out versus oversaturation.

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

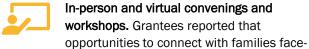
Grantees connected with families with young children using both traditional methods as well as more innovative ones. In fact, grantees explained that there wasn't one specific tactic that was most effective in getting families with young children to complete the census but rather a combination of strategies and communications that were embedded across programs and the organization. Further, while grantees often leveraged strategies that were universal to census outreach, the lens of engaging families and children influenced the messaging, tone, and information that grantees shared so that they were geared towards families and focused on the importance of counting kids. This intentionality helped grantees take general outreach strategies to the next level and gave them a clear focus when doing things like phone banking or creating social media posts.

Grantees estimate that, on the whole, they had **33.9 million interactions with families and individuals** over the course of the ECCF grant. Even when the most wide-reaching activity — digital/print/media outreach — is taken out of the equation, the other activities account for over 269,000 touchpoints. Below is a breakdown of the self-reported reach of the grantees' various outreach and education activities.



^{*} These numbers are based on totals from the end-of-grant reports and are self-reported by each organization. In the grant reports, grantees were asked to differentiate whether the interactions were with families or individuals, and although the findings presented above combine the groups, a detailed breakdown can be found in the Data Appendix on page 22. "Other Activities," which accounts for 500 interactions submitted by one organization, is not presented above but is included in the Data Appendix.

The following examples provide more information about the range of strategies that were employed by grantees and how they adapted them to reach families.



to-face were some of the most effective strategies for engagement. Examples of what was covered in the meetings include information about the history of the census and why it is important to families and children, particularly in LA County. A few organizations noted that tailoring content to specific communities was particularly effective — for example, presenting the data that pertains to specific census tracts and linking it to the services available in that neighborhood. Grantees also were mindful of scheduling convenings and workshops at times that worked best for parents and families.



Trusted messengers, outreach ambassadors, and census advocates.

Grantees consistently said that another one of the most impactful strategies was to enlist the help of peers, community members, *promotoras*, child care providers (including both center-based and inhome networks), teachers, health providers, elected officials, and religious leaders. They found people were much more likely to fill out the census if encouraged by a trusted messenger. Many grantees offered census trainings and informational materials, so the ambassadors were equipped with the knowledge and tools needed. Some grantees provided trusted messengers with curriculum and activities geared toward kids with the hope that they would bring the conversation home to their caregivers.



Phone banking, texting, and canvassing.

Most grantees reached out to community members via phone calls, texting, and canvassing. One grantee estimates that

they had 85,000 interactions through phone and text. Platforms used included Virtual Remote Phone Bank (Political Data Inc.), CallHub, and ThruText/Relay. Grantees noted that staff training and assessing how best to message was important for amplifying the success of this strategy, especially by connecting with families through personal touches such as asking how parents are doing or about their children. However, some grantees faced language barriers when employing this method. Further, since many staff were phone banking from home during COVID-19, they didn't have access to integrated technology or tools to support with real-time translation.



Car caravan. Several of the grantees joined forces and took part in the "We Count LA" Census Caravan on June 17, 2020. They

adorned cars with census signs and drove through census tracts that had low response rates, honking and using megaphones to spread the word about the census.



Social media. Grantees used social media to share posts in multiple languages on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, often

including celebrities, influencers, and memes, to draw attention to the census. Some grantees also led Facebook Live sessions in Spanish and English. Others developed short step-by step instructional videos in English and Spanish, with supplemental worksheets and materials that were posted on their websites and social media accounts. Grantees reported that interactive content was particularly successful. For example, one organization aimed to reach both kids and parents by creating a video about how to make your own slime with a message about the census. Other examples include story-time videos and learning activities that connected back to the census. Grantees reported reaching thousands of families via digital outreach.



Handouts included as part of supply distributions. Grantees saw an opportunity to reach more families as COVID-19 hit and the use of food banks, Grab-and-Go

meals, and supply drives increased. Grantees included visually engaging census postcards and materials in multiple languages. As part of a whole-family engagement strategy, some grantees offered backpacks or swag bags for kids that included census-themed activities, books, and stickers.



Questionnaire Assistance Centers. One grantee set up kiosks in health centers where *promotoras* provided assistance and

technology (via iPads, which helped with digital divide issues) to anyone that had questions or wanted help filling out the census. They reported having 3,845 interactions through this activity. Another grantee had iPads at Grab-and-Go meal pickups to help community members complete the census on the spot. Through doing this, they were able to help approximately 500 families fill out their census form during a single week. Having Spanish-speaking staff available to assist residents was instrumental in the success of both of these examples. It is important to note that not all grantees were able to follow through on their plans for questionnaire assistance kiosks because of COVID-19.



Mass media. Some grantees used widereaching strategies such as public service announcements via radio in English and

Spanish (specifically on Spanish radio stations), billboards, and ads on Google, Facebook, and Instagram. A benefit of this type of communication is the sheer number these media spots reached. Radio spots reached millions and online ads reportedly reached hundreds of thousands.

Limitations due to COVID-19 led to quick and agile pivots.

Everything got flipped upside down in the weeks leading up to Census Day on April 1st, and many grantees found their original outreach and education plans upended over the six months that followed. As shown in the word cloud to the right, "challenging" was the most frequently mentioned descriptor of grantees' outreach experience. followed closely by "innovative." One grantee described how their staff experienced the shift in outreach plans as "very sudden and really debilitating at the beginning, but we pivoted very quickly to increasing our work on the phones." Scripts were developed and grantees became tactical about when and how to engage families through phone and text while also acknowledging everything else going on. "The main thing was to say, 'Hi, how are you doing in these trying times?'

Grantees described their experience with census outreach to families as...



Note: The word cloud reflects the frequency in which grantees used certain words to describe their experience. The larger the text, the more frequently it was mentioned.

Making a more personal connection," explained one grantee. Their team would meet regularly to reflect and strategize, discussing "'What worked for you? What didn't work for you? What can we adjust?' We decided on the best time [to

"The pandemic forced us to reinvent ourselves...the census was the least important thing. The priority was whether there was work, food, a roof over our heads. With the census, it was like, 'Don't even talk to me about that now, please.

Right now, I'm trying to survive.'"

- ECCF Grantee

reach out to] the moms, knowing that we're all in confinement, we're indoors, and we're stressed out."

Many grantees worked swiftly to transform in-person workshops and trainings to video conference. As connection turned virtual, issues of the digital divide surfaced, and lack of access to and familiarity with technology served as a roadblock for many grantees and the families they were trying to reach. On the flip side, some grantees shared that going virtual opened up new opportunities and allowed more people to participate.

Grantees ramped up their efforts on social media and other outlets. "What we realized after COVID is that we not only had to ensure that we had the ground game covered but that we also had to augment that with the air game, meaning our media outlets, both Spanish and English, and our resources on social media so that there was a constant reminder and a continuous message that was being pushed out. Then we reemphasized our ground game efforts through our outreach that we already had with our existing leaders."

Making the connection between the census and the direct impact on people's daily lives, particularly healthcare and education, is especially important to families with young children.

"We used a formula that calculated how much money was allocated for each person. We would then calculate how much money was lost if they didn't count a family of four. People understood that. They'd say, "Wow, that much?'"

- ECCF Grantee

Grantees underscored the importance of impactful and targeted messaging. For parents and caregivers who seemed to be unsure or unfamiliar with the census, grantees found an effective method was to shift the script to talk about how taking 10 minutes to complete the

promesabh

census would impact respondents' children for the next 10 years of their lives. One grantee shared how it seemed to hit home for community members when they explained "where the resources were going to be allocated thanks to the census: for schools, daycares, food stamps, etc. They

heard that and thought, 'This is for my children. This is for my family.'" Making it relevant and personal and "tying in the census with everyday life" was particularly effective.

As COVID-19 took hold, grantees realized that connecting the dots "between resources families are relying on during the pandemic and census funding... like

"With all the negativity and fear-based language and media, the census was an empowerment piece saying, 'You could do something right now. You don't have to wait. This is the one thing you have control over that you can do to help your community and your family. By you being counted, you help me. By me being counted, I help you."

- ECCF Grantee

WIC, SNAP, CalFresh, and Medicare" really resonated with families. Another 23 likes
promesabh This week Promesa Wellness Promotoras
led a (social distanced) Census Outreach booth in
the community ... more

grantee underscored the link between how funding determined by the census helps "essential workers, like the ones who are currently serving our communities. When people could make that connection with COVID-19 and what's currently happening, it became more meaningful." For some families, completing the census became a means of empowerment at a time when people felt particularly powerless.

Building Capacity and Civic Infrastructure

"How could we create a way to get resources to the organizations that we knew had the reach with families but needed the resources to flex a civic engagement muscle?"

- ECCF Managing Funder

In addition to increasing the census count for families with young children, ECCF sought to broaden the pool of organizations that receive funding to conduct census outreach to include trusted community messengers that "may not have as much civic engagement capacity." Through this approach, funders hoped grantees might strengthen capacities across communication, data use, outreach, and community engagement and be better positioned to contribute to other civic engagement and advocacy efforts at both the local and national level. Interviews with grantees revealed that the process of preparing an organization to engage in census outreach uniquely increased capacities in a few key areas.

The development of civic engagement capacities in organizations has led grantees to rethink their future engagement.

At the beginning of this initiative, managing funders were hopeful that ECCF grantees would sustain their civic engagement work beyond participation in the 2020 Census. One managing funder described this grant as a way to "spark the imagination of organizations that are so heavily focused on service provision that they don't have time to even think about what civic engagement means in their context." Grantees perceived their work for the census as the development of a foundation to grow and organize future civic engagement efforts. Organizations said they hope to make a more concerted effort around civic engagement and feel like they now "have a means of operationalizing this type of work." Nearly all grantee organizations said they planned to leverage capacities built through the census to engage communities in the 2020 election,

"We do a lot of programs and curriculum with children. However, I realized that we weren't doing enough with the civic engagement portion. We are in the process of trying to plan out a curriculum where we could start doing that more."

- ECCF Grantee

but interviews revealed that organizations hope to sustain civic engagement work even beyond the election. One grantee explained they want to "engage our community members by talking to them about what issues are important to them. Is it parks? Is it public safety? Is it transportation?" and then "walk them through the process of how to advocate" for those issues. A different grantee said that they think their census work "helped to facilitate our receipt of an additional grant funding...that will go towards parent engagement...which is all about civic engagement and empowering parents to be their own advocates and become leaders within their community."



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

Grantees reported that while in some instances they hired new staff to engage, lead, or coordinate census related activities, census outreach was truly a full-team effort. Through the census work, individuals across departments were able to interact in new 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.

In the process of doing this work, one agency learned that "the overwhelming majority of our employees come from the very community that we serve." This provided grantees with an opportunity to obtain first-hand knowledge about census-related informational needs and opportunities among the members of their community. It also served as a learning opportunity when they discovered that, internally, many staff members were unaware of the importance and value of completing the 2020 census. As staff (including executive leadership) of grantee organizations participated in learning opportunities related to the census, by extension, they hoped their employees would complete the census for their own households. One grantee said, "There were so many anecdotal stories where [staff] would come by and they'd see all our census signage and they'd say, 'By the way, I filled mine out.'"

"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

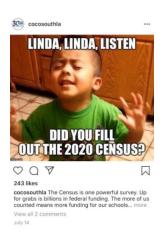
Another agency took a slightly different approach: "For my team, the main thing [was] just having the buy-in from the staff first, talking about the importance of how [the census] impacts us as individuals and as community members. We had a competition going on for making sure as many staff members as possible could actually do it themselves." This grantee shared that the time they spent educating their team "was the greatest capacity-building process."

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

"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

While the unintended rapid transition to digital organizing was not at the forefront for many grantees, COVID-19 drove organizations to examine and build their capacity to connect with their community in new ways. One grantee said, "Our capacity for digital organizing definitely grew." Some grantees created Instagram pages and parent support groups on Facebook and others started to



connect with their community on Zoom and Facebook Live.

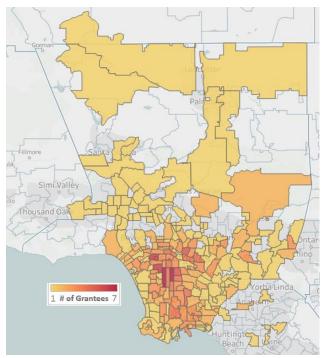
Grantees recognized that if they wanted to grow, they had to organize themselves and their information differently to meet evolving needs. They realized that they had lists of people they had interacted with in the past but had the information about them stored in many different places. Over time, grantees' 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." This experience created the opportunity for individuals to learn how to facilitate trainings and conduct outreach using a laptop. They shared that, ultimately, "our capacity has grown over the months for mastering how to outreach digitally to the hard-to-count communities."

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.

Engagement in community organizing and outreach based on a geographic location is relatively commonplace for service providers. However, as organizations increased their capacity to engage in digital organizing, the meaning of the word "community" shifted. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the map of grantee outreach by zip code, we see darker

Map of Grantee Outreach by Zip Codes



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.

As one grantee put it, "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." Grantees learned how to speak and use messaging that identifies to 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." It is developing this type of knowledge and capacity that some grantees found "very helpful."

Using technology and digital outreach, grantee organizations had the ability to use data to make more strategic decisions. One grantee shared, "We now have an ability to really analyze both the areas that we're hitting really hard. 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 grantee efficiency and created the space 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.

This work also highlighted a low self-responding tract for one grantee organization. Once they were able to identify this community, they tapped into a collaborative relationship that was fostered through this fund to engage individuals in this census tract. While there were some limitations regarding tracking completion rates, the grantee organization gained knowledge and expertise to serve a new neighborhood within their community. They shared that through this work, they found "new communities where we hadn't really worked before."

Networks and Connections

ECCF funders understood that advancing the interests of families with young children and supporting their engagement in the 2020 Census would require coordination, connection, and relationships among grantees and their partners. Network-building supports the coordination and sharing of resources across organizations and creates opportunities for agencies to share diverse ideas that can lead to the types of innovation and experimentation needed to support complex campaigns like the census.

ECCF's population-specific focus and the implementation of peer learning sessions aimed to foster connections to strengthen relationships across grantee organizations. Two virtual peer learning sessions that were facilitated over the course of the grant created space for grantees to share strategies for reaching families with young children, ask questions, and discuss challenges with each other. This section explores the extent to which the Fund facilitated networked ways of working, challenges and barriers to coordination, and considerations for sustaining grantee relationships post-census.

Grantees made new connections that were critical to coordination and hope to sustain relationships moving forward.

While agencies named clear examples of ways partnerships formed between ECCF grantees, some grantees also cited other relationships that were important to their work, including previously established partnerships and connections that were created via other census initiatives, like the Complete Count Committees³ and We Count LA⁴. Across both

"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

types of partnerships, grantees shared tactics for coordination, like utilizing others' messaging, coordinating events together, and sharing outreach scripts and materials in different languages (see the Data Appendix for the list of all languages used). For example, one agency said they were able to develop a relationship with new translators that a partner had worked with, which helped the agency implement inclusive and accessible outreach efforts. They said that this new relationship is one that will continue to help them even after the census.

Working on the census helped introduce grantees to new agencies and reminded them of the opportunities and potential to collaborate with others in their field and region. One grantee said that working on the census with agencies that were already familiar created an opportunity to collaborate on a deeper level, explaining, "This was a way for me to connect directly...really talk and sit at meetings together and discuss, 'Oh, you have this postcard

quote, can we use it?'" A couple of agencies said this effort also helped to spotlight their work and gave them the opportunity to increase others' awareness about the work they do. One grantee from a smaller organization explained that "a lot of times many people don't know [who we are]" but that engagements like the ECCF peer learning sessions help "get their name out there" and say "this is what we do." A few agencies were able to work with partners to target

³ Complete Count Committees are programs of the U.S. Census Bureau that bring together a broad spectrum of government and community leaders to develop and implement 2020 Census awareness campaigns based upon their knowledge of the local community.

⁴ We Count LA is a comprehensive outreach and communications campaign committed to promoting census participation among Los Angeles County's diverse communities. We Count LA is comprised of dozens of community-based organizations (CBOs) that represent the wide demographic and geographic expanse of LA County.

census tracts to avoid duplication of efforts, with one grantee stating, "We divided up the work. We use a map [to say] 'Look, we're focused here,' [so our partners could say], 'Ok, then we will concentrate here so we don't overlap.'"

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, organizations joined forces to mobilize resources and coordinate strategies.

The pandemic presented the biggest barrier to networking and collaboration for grantees. At the most basic level, organizations explained that partnerships are best formed when there are opportunities for in-person connection and that "meeting people online is just different than if we were in person around a table." Although there were opportunities to connect via small group breakout sessions in Zoom, virtual spaces can "take a big toll on everyone" and sometimes limit the ability to have open, organic conversations. In addition to the challenge of connecting virtually, COVID-19 impacted organizations' capacity to align and coordinate efforts while they responded to basic needs and crises elevated by the pandemic. As one grantee said, "Even though I wanted to reach out to this other community agency, either they were really busy or we got really busy, and it was a little bit harder to connect during the pandemic."



Although COVID-19 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 included a car caravan that promoted the census in a spirited and safe way to families and children within neighborhoods in East LA. One grantee explained that the caravan idea emerged from the Complete Count Committee team they were working with and that the relationships they had with other agencies were necessary to carrying out this new strategy.

In addition to the caravan, COVID-19 created opportunities for larger organizations with more capacity to support smaller agencies. For example, one

organization with capacity for phone and text banking shared that they would help make calls to census tracts in other organization's communities that did not have the capacity to implement that strategy. A different agency that was able to continue to provide in-person services during COVID-19 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."

Peer learning sessions fostered connections among grantees during a challenging time.

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. Aspects of the sessions that grantees found most impactful included interactive activities and the breakout groups where individuals could engage in dialogue about the nuances of their work. The

"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 convenings were especially useful when grantees were pivoting their strategies during COVID-19, with one organization explaining that the learning sessions offered "a support group to think innovatively as organizations and not just as a team." Lastly, grantees explained that the peer model reduced silos and competition for funding and made the fund feel truly like a collective effort. One grantee said that agencies "don't always get the opportunity to see how our peers are doing...we compete for funding and then we do it in isolation." A different grantee said that the peer learning sessions were "never competitive" but focused on how organizations could collaborate, share messages and resources around a common goal.

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. Organizations said convening the group earlier would have given grantees more time to build relationships and that it would have been helpful to know more about other organizations' strategies and approaches at the beginning so they were prepared to coordinate and share strategies later on. For example, one grantee said they noticed a lot of agencies pivoted to phone banking and text messaging and said it would have been great to have another training on best practices or strategies so "nobody was reinventing the wheel."

Grantees also said that the peer learning sessions could have been designed in a way that took into consideration organizations' various capacities (e.g., size, number of staff, funding, etc.). Differences in capacity meant that sometimes

"It was never a competitive arena. It was always like,
'How can we collaborate and work together so that the most children are counted? So that the most families are counted?'"

 ECCF Grantee, reflecting on the Peer Learning Sessions

conversations during the learning sessions were not always relevant to the whole group. For example, one larger agency explained, "Some of the grantees were in a much different place than we were, because we were ready to implement the census promotion back in March and some of them were still just ramping up to implementation in the last month." A smaller agency said that the grantee panel that was facilitated in July "felt almost unrelatable for smaller organizations such as us where we don't have as much manpower." Moving forward, breakout groups could be structured to accommodate these differences, or sessions could be used to provide more intentional technical assistance to grantee partners with limited capacity.

ECCF's focus on families with young children added an important lens to collaboration happening at the regional level.

Grantees valued the dedicated funding to focus on outreach with families with young children, with several stating that this focus 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.'" A couple of ECCF grantees that were also involved in

regionally-based census efforts said the narrow scope of ECCF was helpful for discussing specific outreach strategies with partners and that otherwise, "It's a lot of different strategies at once."

Ultimately, grantees cited various partnerships as essential to this work, noting that regional partnerships were often just as important as partnerships with organizations doing outreach to families with young children. One grantee explained, "I almost feel like you have to go down both paths...I feel like we were so successful because we were connected to zero-to-five organizations [through ECCF]...I also feel like we were successful because we were tapped into that larger civic network."



The Funder-Grantee Partnership

This effort marked the first time funders have come together in LA County to support census outreach to families with young children. ECCF used pooled funding to convene a group of funders and rapidly respond to shifting opportunities and needs on the ground. From the beginning of the process, the Fund intentionally sought applications from a wide range of organizations that could support their effort to reach families and children countywide. Ultimately, ECCF funded a diverse group of organizations that ranged in size, population served, geographical focus, and services offered. Further, through this approach, ECCF also hoped to help the philanthropic community more deeply understand the connection between the census and the many programs and services on which the early childhood field is focused.

Identifying a smaller group of managing funders (four people from three organizations) to direct the work allowed the funders and grantees to be responsive, agile, and efficient, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managing funders were empowered to make critical decisions on behalf of the wider group of investors and communicated key milestones and updates to the group over the course of the grant. The evaluation revealed what characteristics are important to the success of this pooled funding model; how the fund's intentionality, latitude, and flexibility supported organizations' successes; and what areas for growth might be considered moving forward.

Trust, infrastructure, and collaboration are critical to the success of this pooled funding model.

The ECCF model sought to create a collaborative space where the managing funders could thoughtfully discuss where to direct funds. Further, each managing funder brought unique expertise, field knowledge, and existing relationships with grantees, which supported shared learning and problem solving, especially when making funding decisions. One managing funder explained that grant applications don't always present what an organization "is really capable of doing or thinking of doing," and that in those instances, "trusting in each other and our other experiences" supported decision making.

"It's both trust and infrastructure...both of those were preexisting in order for us to be able to deploy this vehicle"

In addition to the critical trust and relationships developed among the managing funders, there was also considerable trust with the broader group of funders.

- Managing Funder

Managing funders said the other investors entered the partnership with "significant trust" and gave them the space and autonomy to drive the initiative. One funder explained that the work evolved constantly in terms of who to fund, amount of dollars to allocate, and how to implement peer convenings, and that the wider group of investors supported the shifting approach and constant discussions along the way. Further, one managing funder explained that having the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment play the role of convener ensured that the infrastructure was in place to do this work well: "The LA partnership already had an existing mechanism of a pooled fund and an investors committee model. We didn't have to create that for this project."

Even grantees saw benefits of leveraging a pooled approach to grantmaking. One grantee said an advantage of the model is that "funders can benefit from learning from each other," and that even if their philosophies differ, the model is an opportunity for "everybody to potentially get what they want." A different grantee said that the collective funding model is beneficial because it can introduce smaller organizations to funders they might not have the opportunity to connect with otherwise.

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 Making It Count: Building capacity and connections to count kids in Los Angeles, January 2021 18

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. Grantees also said that the initial process of awarding grants showed them that the funders had confidence in their work and supported a flexible use of the dollars, with one grantee saying that this "empowered us to get going and to be creative." A different grantee explained that they received preliminary feedback on their proposed approach, with funders identifying a few challenges and "potential areas of improvement." The grantee said they "loved the flexibility and that they just didn't give us a 'no,'" but that they "came in fighting for us" and that it felt like they were "thought partners with them along the way."

"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

Relationships-based and rapid-response grantmaking became critical when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. During this time, managing funders leaned into their collaborative grantmaking approach, explaining that they were constantly "recalibrating based off of [grantees'] needs" and that they tried to be "proactive in a way that we hadn't been in months prior." This included dropping progress reports and minimizing administrative burdens so organizations could focus on shifting and pivoting their strategies. Grantees said they appreciated that they didn't have to ask permission to change their strategies and felt the full trust of funders as they adapted their approach to meet the needs of their communities. One managing funder said the relationship building they did with grantees pre-COVID was essential to this response, explaining, "If we had not done that it would have been next to impossible to try to gather them and figure

out what they need...I don't think they would have been as candid with us."

The managing funders' commitment to flexibility and a coordinated approach also led to constant conversations around how to spend down the fund. The managing funders kept making adjustments based on the context and information learned from broader census efforts in LA County and decided to increase the non-response follow-up dollars to support grantees' needs during COVID. Grantees lauded the additional grants a few organizations received post-COVID. One organization said they've never seen a funder operate in that way, adding that the nonprofit sector could benefit from more such flexibility and responsiveness.

Clarity around grant expectations and increased support with networking and coordination were cited as areas for growth.

Although feedback about the funding model was mostly positive, grantees had some suggestions for how the process could be improved in the future. There were a couple components of the grant that were not totally clear at the onset. For example, one grantee said that the expectation of their participation in the evaluation wasn't shared at the beginning. Another grantee explained that expectations around the training facilitated by Families in Schools were not totally clear and that they didn't realize it "was a stipulation for us to receive the grant." As mentioned in the previous section of the report, grantees also had feedback about the need to bring in the peer learning piece earlier in the process.

Further, both grantees and funders 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 is going on with the census, whether it is relaying information from the Census Bureau or sharing information about data and messaging. Given the scale and complexity of the census work being done around Los Angeles, California, and the country, grantees said streamlined information from the managing funders would have been beneficial.

The Road Ahead



The 2020 Census was characterized by constant disruption and upheaval from start to finish, but ECCF grantees and funders continued to persevere in their efforts to ensure families with young children were counted. While Los Angeles County was unable to reach its response rate targets in 2020, the herculean census campaigns did reap other noteworthy benefits.

Grantees and funders gained a range of learnings and insights that emerged during a turbulent year. Grantees not only learned what it takes to conduct census outreach and education to families with young children but also built internal capacities to participate in civic engagement work, developed new relationships with other organizations working in the early childhood sector, and witnessed their own resiliency to stay connected to communities during a global pandemic. Key considerations for future work are highlighted below.

Center families with young children as part of the census.

Nearly all organizations said this grant reinforced the importance of centering children 0-8 as part of the census. Grantees that supported outreach and education for the 2010 Census noted the way their strategies this time around ended up being more intentional and creative because of the population-specific focus. Grantees also said the dedicated funding to focus on outreach with families with young children strengthened the quality of their networks and connections when working with agencies with a shared goal. Although this evaluation is not able to draw any conclusions evaluating the success of specific outreach strategies in impacting the ultimate census count for families with children 0-8, ECCF grantees said the dedicated funding taught them a lot about what it takes to engage families with young children as part of the census. At the highest level, grantees explained how embedding outreach strategies into regular service activities helped to naturally spark conversations about the census with families. Even for young children, designing census education and activities proved to be an effective strategy that brought census messaging into families' homes in new ways. Finally, making the connection between the census, healthcare, and education was especially important for engaging families with young children. Absent the dedicated and intentional focus of Early Childhood Census Fund, efforts to engage families with young children in the census would have looked very different. Families with young children span nearly every hard-to-count population and rely on many of the programs and services that receive census funding, so centering families and children 0-8 as part of the census is an essential strategy to hold on to for future census counts and other civic engagement efforts.

Expand civic engagement funding to direct-service organizations.

By design, ECCF funded a range of agencies that didn't necessarily represent "traditional" civic engagement organizations. As one managing funder explained, "We could have funded all community organizing groups, we could have funded all service providers, but we didn't, we funded a mix of organizations, large, mid-sized, and small." Although some grantees had less experience with civic engagement work, nearly all said their role as "trusted messengers" proved critical during census outreach and education to families with young children. Funders can look to ECCF as an example of what can happen when civic engagement funding is expanded to new spaces. One managing funder explained they "hope other funders will see the synergy between civic engagement and the work that we care about on a programmatic level...don't be afraid of the civic engagement work because, from my perspective, it helps to strengthen the programmatic work."

"We've been wanting to do [civic engagement] but we just didn't really have the mechanism or the funds to start...but once it started, we can keep sustaining it."

- ECCF Grantee

Create space for peer learning and connection.

Most ECCF grantees had not met or collaborated before this effort. While the lack of in-person opportunities made it difficult to connect and build relationships with other organizations, there were still clear examples of ways partnerships formed among grantees and peer learning sessions provided a useful community of practice and "not feeling alone in challenges." The hope is that this funding strengthened coordination and networks in ways that may be durable over time. For example, agencies expressed interest and noted the potential for these partnerships to continue, with one grantee saying, "My own interaction with the other partners that were also doing census outreach and the tools they had was really helpful. I think it could have further implications outside of the census." With complex campaigns and efforts like the census, funders can create systems and spaces that support networked ways of working and coordination. By leveraging their own resources and relationships to reduce siloes among grantees, funders can support grantees to share resources, diverse ideas, and innovations to achieve a common goal.

Provide support through flexible, responsive, and trust-based philanthropy.

The pandemic emphasized the importance of ECCF's grantmaking approach, which was grounded in trust among the group of investors that came together to support a common goal as well as trust of grantees receiving funding. The fund's commitment to transparency and shared decision-making came into play when the pandemic required the extension of grant timelines, budget flexibility, and elimination of burdensome progress reports. Grantees felt supported and empowered to explore and test new approaches to engagement rather than weighed down by what was included in their initial funding proposals, which kept organizations motivated and engaged during a challenging time. Managing funders and grantees shared that this approach to funder-grantee relationships should be embraced post-pandemic. While there is a growing movement for trust-based philanthropy, ECCF is an example of how this approach in practice lends itself to grantee satisfaction and helps organizations realize their grant goals. As one managing funder reflected, "I believe we should trust our grantees and their expertise and knowledge on the ground...I think that we very much lived those capacities in this fund, and I think broadly philanthropy could do some more work in embracing this approach."

Data Appendix

Exhibit 1. Grantees' estimated interactions with families and individuals

This table includes the estimated interactions with families and individuals reported by Early Childhood Census Fund grantees in their respective grant reports submitted in Fall 2020. The estimated range of interactions includes the lowest and highest values submitted by grantees in each activity area included in the report.

Activity	Families		Individuals	Grand Total	
	Total Estimated Interactions	Range of Estimated Interactions	Total Estimated Interactions	Range of Estimated Interactions	
Coalition Building & Volunteer Engagement (n=5)	76	1-45	167	*	243
Community & Education Workshops (n=12)	48,030	30-25,000	4,025	40-436	52,055
Digital/Print/Media Outreach (n=12)	20,008,782	4,000- 20,000,000	13,663,052	3,600- 11,000,000	33,671,834
Door-to-Door Canvassing (n=2)	**	**	375	50-325	375
Other Activities (n=1)	500	*	**	**	500
Phone Banking & Text Messaging (n=7)	119,250	250-100,000	87,208	462-85,000	206,458
Questionnaire Assistance Centers (n=2)	500	*	3,895	*	4,395
Technical Assistance (n=4)	2,000	500-1,500	500	*	2,500
Train the Trainer (n=8)	26	*	3,895	32-3,000	3,921
Grand Total	20,179,088	N/A	13,763,117	N/A	33,942,281

^{*} Only one organization reported estimated interactions for this activity.

^{**} No estimated interactions were reported for this activity.

Exhibit 2. Zip codes where grantees conducted outreach based on data provided in grant reports.

ECCF 2020 Outreach and Education in LA County (Zip Codes)

90001	90029	90063	90255	90501	90713	90814	91203	91406	91765
90002	90031	90064	90260	90502	90714	90815	91204	91411	91766
90003	90032	90065	90262	90503	90715	90822	91205	91436	91767
90004	90033	90066	90266	90504	90716	90831	91206	91475	91768
90005	90034	90067	90270	90505	90717	90832	91208	91504	91770
90006	90035	90073	90272	90506	90723	90833	91303	91505	91771
90007	90036	90094	90273	90601	90731	90834	91304	91506	91773
90008	90037	90201	90274	90603	90732	90835	91306	91601	91776
90011	90038	90210	90275	90604	90744	90840	91307	91605	91780
90012	90039	90211	90277	90605	90745	90842	91316	91606	91789
90013	90040	90212	90278	90606	90746	90844	91321	91702	91790
90015	90042	90220	90280	90630	90747	90846	91324	91706	91801
90016	90043	90221	90291	90631	90749	90847	91325	91711	92704
90017	90044	90222	90292	90638	90755	90848	91331	91722	92705
90018	90045	90230	90293	90640	90801	90853	91335	91723	92801
90019	90046	90232	90301	90650	90802	90895	91340	91731	92870
90020	90047	90240	90302	90660	90803	90899	91342	91733	93532
90021	90049	90241	90303	90670	90804	91001	91343	91740	93535
90022	90056	90242	90304	90701	90805	91010	91344	91744	93536
90023	90057	90245	90305	90703	90806	91030	91350	91745	93550
90024	90058	90247	90401	90704	90807	91042	91351	91746	93552
90025	90059	90248	90402	90706	90808	91101	91352	91747	
90026	90061	90249	90403	90710	90809	91103	91381	91748	
90027	90062	90250	90404	90711	90810	91106	91401	91754	
90028	90063	90254	90405	90712	90813	91201	91402	91755	

Exhibit 3. Languages supported by grantee organizations in their census outreach from grant reports

