

Census 2020

The count starts now. Is Minnesota ready?



Minnesotans prepare to make sure all rural residents are counted in census

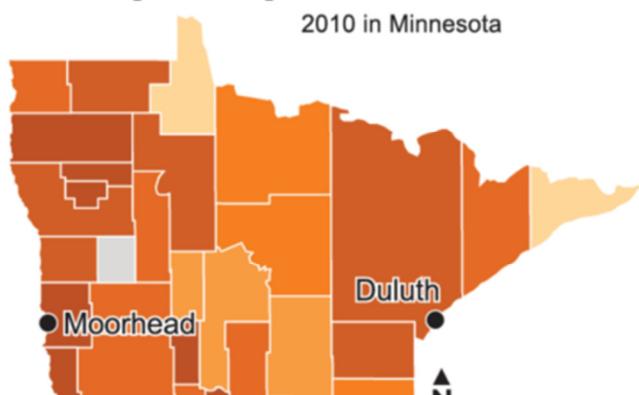
By Don Davis on Apr 14, 2017

ST. PAUL—Minnesotans involved in the once-every-decade federal census say now is time to take action so people do not find themselves victims of a bad 2020 April fool's joke.

In 2020, April 1 is Census Day, when all Americans are supposed to be counted in a ritual required by the U.S. Constitution. But some in Minnesota fear that federal funding shortfalls, using the internet to fill out census forms and other factors could mean many Minnesotans will be missed. "I do think there are significant risks," Joan Naymark said. "I have never been more concerned in my 30 years of working with the census."

Counting people and where they live may not be the most exciting issue to the public, but Naymark and others involved in the census say it is vital

"It is all about money and power," said Naymark, founder of a volunteer organization dedicated to the census and a related survey. "Census is boring until you think it is all about money and power."



Minnesota is better
when everyone counts

Minnesota Census Mobilization Partnership

A partnership convened by Minnesota Council on Foundations
Minnesotans for the American Community Survey / 2020 | Common Cause - Minnesota
Wilder Foundation / MN Compass | Asian American Organizing Project | Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
Join the Partnership. Contact - pubpol@mcf.org or 612.335.3558



MINNESOTA COUNCIL
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The money is government funding that state and federal officials often dole out based on population. If people are not counted in the census, their communities may get less money. The federal government gives local governments and states about \$400 billion annually based on census counts.

Also on the fiscal side is money private companies invest, in part based on census data.

The power is about politics. Minnesota is on the bubble for losing one of its eight U.S. House seats, a seat it barely kept after the 2010 census. For rural areas, a census undercount could cede power to urban and suburban areas in the Minnesota Legislature.

Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton has asked for \$190,000 a year through 2021 to hire two people in the state demographer's office to make sure all Minnesotans are counted.

Republicans who control the state House and Senate have not included that money in their funding plans, which will be negotiated with Dayton in the coming weeks.

"We have a full-time demographer's office," said Chairwoman Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth, of the House State Government Finance Committee. "This is part of their responsibility. ... They can do this with their existing funds."

State Demographer Susan Brower, Naymark and others say state and local governments need to take responsibility, especially since it looks like the federal Census Bureau will not receive as much money as its officials say they need.

While local governments need to help the federal Census Bureau check addresses, including making sure new ones are on the census list, not all have the resources, Brower said.

"We would like to make sure someone is filing in the gaps where local governments aren't being able to do it," Brower said.

Northern Minnesota counties with sparse populations and the state's largest American Indian reservations have some of the highest numbers of uncounted residents, Census Bureau figures show.

Figures from 2010 show Minnesota was second only to Wisconsin in filling out census forms, with 81 percent participating without reminders.

However, that rate varied among counties. Suburban Washington County recorded an 88 percent mark, while Lake of the Woods County on the Canadian border in northwestern Minnesota only hit 31 percent.

Rural minorities overall are the most likely to be missed, which predicts an issue some see in the 2020 Minnesota census. More immigrants are moving to cities like Worthington and Willmar to work in local industries, and many may not be familiar with the census or may not trust government.

Brower said immigrants who move often, such as those involved in seasonal agricultural jobs, are tough to catch. Dr. Kathleen Annette, who heads the Grand Rapids-based Blandin Foundation, said she was surprised to learn how serious the rural undercount could be.

Annette grew up on the Red Lake Reservation and is a member of the White Earth Nation, both in northwestern Minnesota, and worked for the Indian Health Service in Bemidji.

"What we have heard for many years is 'We don't have a voice,'" Annette said of rural residents. "Rural Minnesota feels they are not being heard ... (but an) accurate census can lead to a strong voice, can lead to us having the representation."

Like others in rural Minnesota, Annette said one problem she foresees is the Census Bureau move to collect more data via the internet. "Not all places have that access."

If people do not respond via internet, they can expect telephone calls, letters and perhaps even a knock on the door by census workers.

Just knowing where occupied homes are can be difficult.

Brower said census workers plan to use several methods to see where homes actually are, including address lists private businesses and local governments possess as well as satellite photos available from Google.

The latest news from **MINNPOST**

As the State Demographer's office gears up to count Minnesotans, can it count on the Legislature?

By Briana Bierschbach | April 17, 2017

Other than war, the census might be the U.S. government's biggest undertaking.

Since 1790, when the founding fathers included the once-every-decade population count in the Constitution, people have fanned out across the country, knocking on doors and marking down every person they can find. More than 600 federal marshals handled the first-ever census, counting 3.9 million people living in the United States. But as the country grew, so did the endeavor.

The 2010 census required 635,000 staffers to help count more than 308 million people.

This year is Susan Brower's first time playing a role in the massive operation. She became Minnesota's state demographer in 2012, just after the last count wrapped up, and now her office is preparing for Census Day 2020.



Susan Brower

The state demographer acts as Minnesota's official liaison to the U.S. Census Bureau, handling promotion and outreach to get the broadest possible snapshot of who actually lives in the state. "I am excited because there is so much energy around this," Brower said.

But then she paused: "Well, I have mixed feelings about it."

Her ambivalence is due to the uncertainty about additional funding in the state budget this year to start preparing for the count. Though Gov. Mark Dayton does include \$190,000 in his budget proposal for the state demographer to hire two temporary staffers for the next four years, the additional funding is not included in either the House or Senate budget bills.

For the head counters, it's put uncertainty on an already fuzzy situation. Amid battles over health care reform and the Supreme Court, Congress has yet to agree and pass a basic funding bill to keep government operations running for 2017. That includes money for the U.S. Census Bureau, which has delayed running field tests and opening offices to prepare for 2020. What's more, concerns over data security and the Trump administration's immigration policies have fueled fears that some people will try to avoid being counted this year.

It's bureaucracy at its driest, but there's a lot at stake for Minnesota, experts say. The federal government will use the 2020 data to better understand equity gaps and demographic shifts and dole out more than \$400 billion dollars in grants to states every year for 10 years. Perhaps the biggest question, however, is whether enough people are counted in 2020 for Minnesota to retain all eight of its seats in Congress.

"It's unfortunate that it looks like it's turning into a partisan issue," said Bob Tracy, director of public policy and communications with the Minnesota Council on Foundations. "The bigger question is, are we going to end up turning the census into another fundamental democratic institution that we are going to degrade?"

Government 'depends on the accuracy of this'

Minnesotans learned plenty about their home after the last census. The state had grown by 384,446 people over the last decade, for example, and hit a total population of about 5.3

million. Much of that growth was in suburban communities around Minneapolis and St. Paul — and in large part thanks to an influx of new citizens. The state was becoming more diverse from the bottom up, according to the numbers, with 17 percent of its residents identified as racial minorities, up from 12 percent a decade earlier.



MinnPost photo by Sean SmudaTom Gillaspay

That year, Minnesota also had the second census highest participation rate in the nation (after Wisconsin), with about 81 percent of people returning mail-in forms back to the census. It didn't happen on its own, said Tom Gillaspay, who was Minnesota's demographer for more than 30 years. His office got a boost in funding to hire staff in preparation for the 2010 census, jobs he admits aren't very glamorous.

In 2010, an extra staffer collected address lists from local governments to cross check them with the federal sources. Eventually, census forms are mailed out to every one of those addresses, but an additional staffer must help reach communities that are harder to track. In Minnesota, American Indian communities are historically difficult to count, as well as children, people who are homeless and immigrants or refugees who are reticent to answer questions from the government.

"The census only happens one every 10 years," Gillaspay said. "There are many many people who have forgotten that there is such a thing. There are also people who are new to the country and maybe someone knocking on their door and saying, 'Hi, I'm from the government and I have some questions,' is not their favorite thing."

"We want to make sure the count is as accurate as it can possibly be," Gillaspay added. "The Constitution calls for a decennial census. A count of all the people, not just citizens, but everybody living in the United States. The whole basis of our government depends on the accuracy of this."



REUTERS/Yuri Gripas

Then-Director of U.S. Census Bureau Robert Groves speaking during a presentation of the 2010 Census U.S. population at the National Press Club on Dec. 21, 2010.

And censuses don't happen in a vacuum — each poses its own difficulties. Citizens are counted amid wars, economic depressions and major cultural and demographic shifts, and the upcoming count is no different.

Some are worried it will be even more challenging to count immigrants and refugees in 2020, with President Donald Trump's hard-line rhetoric and executive orders regarding undocumented immigrants. And 2020 is the first time citizens will be asked to fill out a census form online; in a time of heightened uncertainty about government data collection, it has raised plenty of concerns from data privacy advocates.

"The whole privacy thing is one of their key challenges and opportunities," said Joan Naymark, who sat on an advisory council for the U.S. Census Bureau while she worked at Target Corp.

Now retired from Target, Naymark started a group called MACS 2020, a group of about 200 volunteers who promote the American Community Survey — a yearly collection of population data on a much smaller sample — as well as the decennial census. Naymark said it's critical that the census gets the funding it needs to set up an online filing system that actually works.

"You don't want to have a healthcare.gov situation where it crashes when it's launched," she added. "Then there's the fear of, 'Well, what if there is a big hack on a computer system? What if someone impersonates someone else?' A bad headline like that right before the census that could cripple their ability to hold people's trust and collect responses."

Hard look at agency spending

Historically, Minnesota has added funding to the demographer's office for the census. Republicans in control of the state Legislature, however, are pushing a reexamination of state budgeting this year, scrutinizing everything from the state's massive health and human services budget to smaller offices, like the state demographer.

The House and Senate Republican budgets don't include increases to add staff for the census, and the House bill actually cuts money from the office's base budget. House State Government Finance Chair Sarah Anderson said she was examining the demographer's budget and noticed that some money from the 2010 census was ongoing and seemed to have been added to the permanent budget for the department.

"There was money for the census since the last census," said Anderson, a Republican from Plymouth. "It's been an ongoing budget item added to the base since the last census. We've had that money all along, so my question is: What have they done with that money?"

Brower said there's a ramp up and a ramp down before and after the census. Only some of that money — about \$70,000 — was subsequently added permanently to the demographer's budget to cover increases in costs over the years, she said.

The whole budget for the demographer's office is about \$1 million every two years. That pays for four full-time staffers and the data storage and technology needed to run the office, according to Brower. Without the extra funding, she said, "We will have to make do with whatever we have," for the upcoming census.

“For me, the outcome would be that we have data that aren’t as high quality as it could be, that we missed people,” Brower said.

While that’s a very real outcome, Brower said it’s hard for most people to wrap their heads around what missing some people in a population count could mean.

Gillaspy is more frank about the consequences: If participation is low, Minnesota will likely lose one of its eight congressional seats. He said Minnesota has been on the cusp of losing a congressional seat for the last two decades, but it held on because of high participation and engagement in the census. “For three decades, we outcompeted many of the other states in terms of that promotional activity,” he said. “And we just eked by and kept our eight congressional seats.”



Minnesota at risk of losing a congressional seat after 2020 census



By ERIC ROPER, STAR TRIBUNE
April 16, 2017

Minnesota is facing the risk of losing one of its congressional seats after the next census amid booming population gains elsewhere in the country, a rare event that could diminish the state’s voice in Washington.

It’s been half a century since Minnesota last lost a congressional seat, and more than a century since it had fewer than eight representatives in the U.S. House. But despite outpacing the rest of the Midwest in population gains since 2010, Minnesota’s growth has been overshadowed by massive shifts in places like Texas and Florida.

Similar fears of losing a seat preceded the 2010 census, when Minnesota ultimately retained to its eighth seat by just a couple of thousand people. A lot could change before the 2020 census, which determines how the seats are distributed, but state demographer Susan Brower said Minnesota appears more at risk than last time. Most national analyses are forecasting that Minnesota will drop a seat based on current population trends. “It’s not certain, but it looks serious and it looks like it’s maybe even likely,” Brower said.

That will mean divvying up the state into seven logical slices rather than eight during redistricting, which occurs every 10 years. And at least one member of the delegation would have to pack his or her bags in 2022.

It sets the stage for a particularly contentious fight over drawing the lines, potentially attracting more out-of-state interest in state elections in 2018 and 2020 — including next year’s governor’s race. The Legislature has authority over redistricting, subject to veto from the governor, though the courts have had to make the final maps for several decades. “That adds a whole new level of partisan intensity to the elections that might affect the reapportionment,” said Steven Schier, a political science professor at Carleton College.

Losing a seat would also knock down the state’s clout in the Electoral College since the electors are tied to the number of representatives in Congress.

There are further concerns about the census itself, which will for the first time rely heavily on existing data to gather addresses and the internet to handle responses — rather than canvassing and responses by mail. The Government Accountability Office recently labeled the 2020 census “high risk” due to lack of preparedness for using the new techniques.

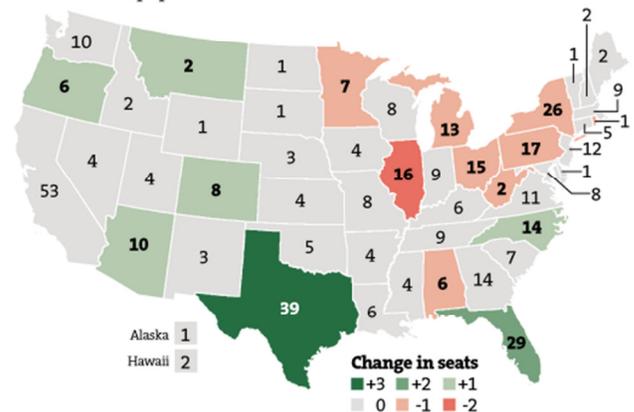
Bob Tracy of the Minnesota Council on Foundations, which is helping lead a partnership gearing up for the census, highlighted the need to be prepared.

“The census is the largest mobilization we do as a country besides going to war,” Tracy said. “If we’re not doing development and testing, it could be really ugly come April 1st, 2020.”

RUNNING BEHIND

Minnesota is poised to lose a congressional seat following the 2020 Census, if current trends hold. Seats are doled out based on a complicated formula tied to a state’s population relative to other states. The map below is a projection and could change based on shifting trends.

Projected seat distribution following 2020 Census
Based on latest population trends



Source: Election Data Services

JIM FOSTER • Star Tribune

Bigger in Texas

Minnesota has added about 216,000 people since 2010, based on the latest estimates from the Census Bureau, a growth rate of about 4 percent. Most of it was due to births outpacing deaths and international migration rather than domestic migration. About 85 percent of the state’s growth was in the seven-county metro area.

Texas, Florida and California, by comparison, have all grown by more than a million people. Florida and Texas are each expected to pick up a couple of congressional seats, based on an analysis by

Virginia-based Election Data Services, a consulting firm that tracks the issue. States the group expects to lose a seat are largely Midwestern and Northeastern, including Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Alabama and West Virginia.

The distribution of congressional seats is calculated by balancing each state's population relative to others. Kimball Brace of Election Data Services said Minnesota's closest competition to keep its eighth seat is likely Montana, which is projected to possibly pick up an extra seat by a slim margin.

Nonetheless, Brower said, "We're growing really well, actually, as compared to our neighbors."

If Minnesota loses a seat, it's likely to result in larger districts with a wider variety of constituents.

"As districts get larger, you have a more diverse population, which makes it more challenging in Congress to meet all the needs of your constituents," said Rep. Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth, who chaired the House redistricting committee in 2012. The goal is to keep communities of interest together, she said.

Former DFL congressman Tim Penny said having three largely rural districts, two for the central cities and three for suburban and exurban areas has been a logical way of carving up the state. That would be lost with one fewer seat, he said, and may result in broader rural districts with less cohesion.

"There's no denying that it diminishes the rural voice. And that is concerning," said Penny, now president of the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.

to get around. Now the dean of Minnesota's delegation after 26 years in Congress, Peterson, a Democrat, is concerned about a shake-up diminishing the seniority of the state's delegation.

"If losing a seat and reapportioning the districts causes complete upheaval so we've got all freshman congresspeople, that is going to significantly alter what we're able to accomplish for Minnesota," Peterson said.

Preparing to count

Redistricting has already captured some attention at the State Capitol this year. The House and Senate have passed GOP-backed bills that would enshrine principles of redistricting into state law, such as not drawing lines to protect or oust incumbents and not diluting minority voting strength.

But first Minnesota needs to find out how many people live here and how many congressional seats the state gets.

Minnesota had the second-highest participation rate in the 2010 census, after Wisconsin.

Tracy, of the Council on Foundations, said that was in part because of the public and private money invested in outreach. His group is pushing for additional funding for the demographer's office in the next budget to help staffers prepare.

Congressman Collin Peterson's rural district on the state's western edge is already so large that he pilots a Beechcraft Bonanza plane