A Child Advocate's Roadmap to 2030

The Leadership Conference for Human And Civil Right Education Fund and the Census Counts campaign (which brings together community-based organizations working to ensure communities the census has historically missed are counted) have created a Roadmap to 2030, a guiding document of milestones and actions leading to the goal of a "complete count" of all persons in the United States during the 2030 Census. We encourage you to use it as you plan your work. We also know there are special steps that child advocates should undertake and special resources for child advocates to use. The net undercount of young children has continued to increase every decade since 1980. What the Census Bureau is doing is not working. The Census Bureau needs to employ new methods in 2030, and those methods need to be tested before 2030. So here is a child advocates' supplement to the Roadmap to 2030 which will both guide your efforts and flag key opportunities to get the Bureau to try new approaches.

To see our suggestions for 2025, click here.

2026

The Roadmap to 2030 includes these steps, for which we offer some child-focused options:

Leverage 2020 Census (and ACS) Data for Civil and Human Rights Advocacy

Good data resources for child advocates include the KIDS COUNT data center and the KIDS COUNT grantee in your state. The Coalition on Human Needs also has a library of state, congressional district, and major metropolitan data tables from the American Community Survey (ACS), many of which are specific to children.

Engage with Funders on 2030 Census Design and Outreach Support

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has funded focus groups with children's funders to determine what aspects of the Count All Kids work will be most compelling to them. In August 2025, Count All Kids shared. We will also offer a webinar in October 2026 and individual support to child advocacy groups to help determine which activities to undertake and how best to educate funders about those needs.

Monitor and Contribute to 2030 Census R&D Decisions

The Count All Kids Committee meets monthly to discuss new research, as well as other developments, and what it means for 2030. In July 2025 the Bureau released the first draft of its operational plan for the 2030 census, which indicates some of the ways they may use that research. Sign up here to get emails with information about research results and major Census developments. Email jbattistelli@chn.org to get added to the Committee listserve and join our monthly meetings.

Educate Entities on the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA)

We know that many children are missed because their address is not on the master address file, and therefore their families do not get a census form. In Texas it was one of the top reasons why young children were missed in 2020. Young children have the highest poverty rate of any age group, which means their families often struggle to pay for housing and end up living with family members or in "hidden" or accessory housing. Getting their addresses on the master address file is an important step toward getting them counted, and states and localities can add addresses to the master address file through the LUCA process. You can learn more about LUCA here and more about the current LUCA plans here.

The Census Bureau is planning to start the LUCA process in 2027. A funder and advocate LUCA Working Group conducted a webinar in June 2025 which you can watch and released a resource guide (just updated in July 2026) for stakeholders to help improve LUCA participation in your state or community. They include great examples of how participation in LUCA made a difference for communities in 2020. The LUCA working group may also develop a cost estimating tool for LUCA participation. The National League of Cities also has a helpful webpage for policymakers including a timeline and key steps that you can share.

Now that these resources are available, you can start educating policy makers who can champion efforts to participate in LUCA, and you will also want to seek coalition partners and funding for your work, so that you are prepared for 2027. This data visualization, which shows the undercount of young children in every state and county, may help you decide which areas to focus on.

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, child advocates can also monitor and participate in the actions below.

Check How Many Children Were Missed in Your State and County in 2020

The Census Bureau released this interactive map which shows the young child undercount in 2020 for all states and most counties. The larger the county, the more young children are likely to be missed. It also shows the level of four factors which correlate with that undercount for each county, which may help you consider how to address the undercount county by county.

Build Champions for Complete Count Committees

In 2026, you will want to start looking for legislative champions who will sponsor and advocate for state and local Complete Count Committees or building relationships with legislative champions you have already developed. This data visualization, which shows the undercount of young children in every state and county, may help you decide which areas to focus on. We hope that a cost estimating tool will be available for your work. You can learn more about what should be included in a Complete Count Committee budget here. As you educate prospective champions you will want to educate them about the particular challenges in counting young children, and the various groups that should be included in any Complete Count Committee. In the next year there will be an interactive mapping application from CUNY which identifies the Census tracts that have persistently low return rates. This will be very useful for targeting outreach and perhaps for fundraising.

Watch for Reports on the 2026 Census Test

In 2026, the Bureau radically revised its plans for the 2026 Census test. Originally it was going to test a number of new strategies for improving the count of various groups including young children in six sites. However, early in 2026 the Commerce Department revised this plan, reducing the test two sites, taking out most of the new strategies, and adding in using Postal workers (an approach the Bureau had tested and rejected several times in the past.) The test began May 1 2026 and is being conducted through August 2026, in Huntsville, Alabama and Spartansburg, South Carolina. The GAO produced a report, **The** Census Bureau Needs Additional Data to Inform Design Decisions**,** recommending that "The Secretary of Commerce should instruct the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau to research and test the operational activities and design features removed from the 2026 Census Test prior to finalizing its design of the 2030 Census." And the Commerce Department agreed with the recommendation. Therefore, you should watch for any reports on the results of the 2026 Census Test, and also for any efforts by the Census Bureau to comply with the GAO recommendation.

Review the Message Testing Count All Kids Conducted in 2019

In 2019, Count All Kids conducted the first ever public opinion research on whether people would include their young children when completing the 2020 Census and what messages would make them more likely to do so. If you are considering conducting your own public opinion research, review these findings first. If you are not, review them to incorporate the findings into your work. A summary of these findings is in our 2020 Toolkit. Also check whether Count All Kids is conducting more research as we move toward 2030.

Build Champions for Complete Count Committees

In 2026 you will want to broaden your effort to get policy makers to support state and local Complete Count Committees. This data visualization, which shows the undercount of young children in every state and county, may help you decide which areas to focus on. We hope that a cost estimating tool will be available for your work. You can learn more about what should be included in a Complete Count Committee budget here. As you educate prospective champions you will want to educate them about the particular challenges in counting young children, and the various groups that should be included in any Complete Count Committee. You can also share with them a blog we will produce soon that documents the research of Professor Rocco, Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science and author of Counting Like a State: How Intergovernmental Partnerships Shaped the 2020 US Census. His research matched similar census tracts in areas with and without state investments in outreach, and found that state investments improved the self-response rates. Since self-response has been shown to be the most accurate way to get census data, this is a strong reason for states to engage in Census outreach. His results particularly showed improved response rates in tracts with high numbers of renters, and tracts with high levels of racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. This is exciting since those factors also correlate with challenges in counting young children.

Identify Local Benefits of the Census

This is the time to identify changes in your community that may have happened because of data from the 2020 Census. It's a good time to check in with your state demographers, local policy makers, local foundations, and nonprofits. Find out what improvements in your local community were based on census data. These might include new roads, new public services such as libraries and firehouses, new businesses such as grocery stores in food deserts, or grants that your community received based on population such as replacing pipes with lead. You can use this information to help persuade people of the benefits of responding to the census in 2030.

Monitor the Impacts of the New Commerce Department Order on Your State and Locality Data

The Commerce Department issued a new order on June 4, 2026 about how the Census Bureau should release data while protecting privacy. The Census Bureau has not yet released any information about how it intends to comply with this order. Advocates are deeply concerned that this order will mean less precise data, less data released, or both. It may also mean delays in data releases, particularly the American Community Survey, which historically has been released in September. Watch for this release, and when it is released, check if it includes the same data for your community that you have used in past years, or if the data for your community has been suppressed or coarsened. Let Count All Kids know what the order has meant for your community so we can assess the impact, and let your policy makers know.

2027

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, here are some things child advocates should consider.

Educate Complete Count Committees about Counting Young Children

As you build relationships with your local and/or state Complete Count Committee(s) (CCC), make sure that their members are fully informed about the challenges of counting young children. Make sure they understand that the quality of the count of young children is unrelated to the quality of the count of older children and adults. See if you or other child advocates can be put on your state or local Complete Count Committee. Connecting with a legislative ally is a good start.

Improving the count of young children will require special outreach strategies and messaging targeted to households with young children. If the Complete Count Committee has many subcommittees, they all need to be educated about why children are missed and their particular subcommittee's role in counting young children. For example, businesses can host ads and notices on aisles that sell baby supplies such as diapers and formulas, schools can send home notices and materials and also host nights to help people fill out the forms, and social services agencies can use their electronic systems to remind people to count their babies and young children. You should also share tools like the data visualization that shows how many children were missed in each county. The Census Bureau may be conducting the Census Barriers and Motivators study repeatedly as we move toward 2030. Count All Kids will share any findings made public, so review and share the results of these studies.

Prepare for the 2028 Census Test

In 2027 we expect the Census Bureau to announce the locations of its 2028 Census "Dress Rehearsal" test. Watch to see if those locations include your community, and what strategies they are planning to use to improve the count of young children. If one of the tests will be in your community, start organizing now to monitor and report out whether the test successfully counted young children, and secure funding for you to undertake this work.

2028

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, here are some things child advocates should consider.

Build Relationships with Government Agencies

This is a good time to start building relationships with government agencies that serve families with young children, such as schools, child care subsidy agencies, SNAP agencies, WIC agencies, and Medicaid agencies. Educate them about how their funding depends on a complete count of young children, and discuss with them how they can use their communications systems to reach out to families in 2030. Make sure you have plans with schools for the start of the 2029 school year, which is when most parents are particularly careful to read materials that are sent home.

Build a Network of Child Serving Agencies

This is the year to connect with the many kinds of organizations that serve families with young children that can participate in outreach, educating them about how many children are missed, how it affects their funding, and what strategies we think will work to improve the count of young children. Work with them to figure out how they best can reach the families they serve. Can they send texts flagging the need to count young children? Can they show videos in waiting rooms? Can they make their computer centers available for people? Can they provide translation services, perhaps by getting fellow parents to volunteer? Here is a partial list of potential community partners you can reach out to: Pediatricians and pediatric care providers, children's hospitals and maternity wards, Early Intervention service providers, child care providers and Pre-K/Head Start sites, home visiting programs, family resource centers and family guidance centers, libraries, schools and PTAs, teachers' unions, faith communities, businesses that serve families with young children, WIC agencies, and diaper banks. Make sure you include immigration lawyers and organizations that serve particular immigrant communities.

Build a Key Dates Young Child Outreach Calendar

As you prepare for the Census, create a calendar of all the key dates you can use as communications points for outreach. Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Grandparents' day, the start of school, are just the starting point. You can see the dates that advocates used in 2020 here. Start reaching out to organizations that are a natural fit with particular days to develop communications

actions (for example, agencies that serve grandfamilies might agree to take the point position on grandparents' day).

Monitor the 2028 Census Test

If your community is chosen for the 2028 Census test, monitor, and report out on the efforts to count young children. If it isn't, watch for reports on what worked and what didn't, and incorporate those findings into your census plan.

Watch for the Announcement of What Questions Will Be on the Census

The Census Act requires the Census Bureau to submit to Congress the questions they propose to ask on the 2030 Census no later than April 1, 2028. Watch to see if the Bureau proposes to include a question about citizenship or immigration status. While the Supreme Court ruled that such a question could not be on the 2020 census, their decision was based on the process, and did not preclude including such a question on future censuses. Because one in four children live in a household with at least one immigrant parent, and because such a question might significantly reduce the number of households that respond, if such a question is on the census you will need to address this issue in your communications plan, even though nearly all young children in the US are born here and therefore US citizens.

2029

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, here are some things child advocates should consider.

Kick Off Your Communications Efforts To Reach Families This Year

We know families need to hear things many times and from different sources to be convinced they are true and important. So start your efforts in 2029, educating trusted partners about how they can inform people about how the census is tied to funding for the state and community, and to political power. Make sure the messages are explicit that they should both respond and count everybody, including babies and young children. Make sure you have outreach materials in the languages in your community, and that they include links to any Census Bureau information about the 2030 census in that language. Share tools with schools and agencies that serve children, so that they can use their regular communications mechanisms to reach families.

Count All Kids hopes to have updated communications research and to offer social media tools as well as copyable posters, handouts, stickers, and other resources, based on that research. The Census Bureau will be conducting the Census Barriers and Motivators study repeatedly as we move toward 2030. Count All Kids will share any findings made public, so review and share the results of these studies.

2030

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, here are some things child advocates should consider.

Target Your Outreach Efforts and Monitor Response Rates for Communities Which Historically Miss Many Young Children

We anticipate that you will be able to use a map similar to the 2020 Hard To Count Map to monitor response rates in your state and localities. As you monitor 2030 Census implementation in real time to identify communities that might require additional outreach to ensure an accurate count, check whether Count All Kids is offering any tools to help monitor response rates in areas where young children are at high risk of being missed. We were able to provide such data in 2020 with the help of the Population Reference Bureau and hope to be able to provide such tools again.

2031

In addition to the activities in the Roadmap, here are some things child advocates should consider.

Document Your Work

As you document and preserve the work your organization did for the 2030 Census, be sure to note the members of your census coalition and broader network (such as trusted messengers) and share your documentation with the national Count All Kids Committee.

Watch for Reports on How Well the 2030 Census Counted Young Children

The Bureau released its first assessment of the count of young children in the 2020 Census in March of 2022, nearly two years after the census started and 17 months after the final day. We hope they will be able to release this data more quickly, and that it will be available in 2031. It released experimental state and county data in April 2024, and we hope that they will be able to release that data in 2032 or 2033.