

2020 CENSUS – Who, What, When, Where & Why Do We Count? (Not necessarily in that order)

With the 2020 Census well underway, many people may be wondering what the big deal with the census is or why they should care when there are so many other things to worry about right now. The fact is that an accurate census count is a huge deal that can do many beneficial things for our community, and each and every one of us should be promoting the census and encouraging the people we know to do it, too. You and your neighbor may not always see things eye-to-eye, but everyone can and should agree on the merits of participating in the census.

When the Constitution of the United States was written, our forefathers, in their great wisdom, chose population over wealth or land to be the basis for sharing political power. The population totals from the census determine the number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives, so consider every voice that is counted in the upcoming census is one that strengthens the voice of the entire community. Do we want to be heard? Well then we need to be counted!

In addition to political power, an accurate census count can help ensure we receive our portion of federal funding doled out each year to the tune of \$675 billion. That is a big chunk of change that the federal government gives back to communities each year to help with funding schools, hospitals, roads, public works and other vital programs. Do we need our fair portion of that funding in our community? Who doesn't, right? So we need to be counted!

Who else uses census data? Businesses use it to decide where to build factories, offices and stores, creating jobs and boosting our quality of life. Developers use it to build new homes and revitalize old neighborhoods. Local governments use it for public safety and emergency preparedness. Even residents use it to support community initiatives involving legislation, consumer advocacy, and, again, quality of life. Do we want to see these things in our community? Of course! So we need to be counted!

So, that pretty much covers the 'Why', but what about Who, What, When & Where?

The Decennial Census is a headcount that occurs every ten years on April 1st of every man, woman and child (can't forget those babies!) living in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas of the United States, and includes people of all ages, races, ethnic groups, citizens and noncitizens. As noted above, full participation can be critical for a community. The U.S. Census Bureau is tasked with keeping all information that is collected private, by federal law, even from other branches of government, so there is no reason not to participate. When you respond to the census, your answers are kept anonymous, and can only be used to produce statistics.

The Decennial Census has been conducted every ten years since 1790, when census takers had to visit nearly every home in the U.S. to gather data. Since then, data has been collected through mail-in census forms, dial-in phone calls and door-to-door counting by census takers. For the first time ever, responders will now be able to submit

their census data online at <https://my2020census.gov> as well as by phone or by mail. Most housing units that receive mail at their physical location have already received a letter by mail with instructions on how to complete the census questionnaire. In areas where the majority of housing units do not have mail delivered to their physical location, census workers will leave questionnaire packages at every identified housing unit.

When you take a look at the questionnaire, some questions might seem odd or overly personal, but the data they pull enables us to recognize important trends in our society. Together, these responses help provide us with a snapshot of current American households, and help to determine funding for federal nutrition and education programs, housing programs, and other social services that provide benefits to many U.S. communities.

Historically, Polk County residents have underperformed when it comes to the census, which means that our voice is not as loud as it should be and we are not considered for the level of federal funding that we deserve. Further, the U.S. Census Bureau is predicting that over 10,000 people living in Polk County are unlikely to self-respond to the 2020 Census. Some of those will get counted through other means, but a lot of people that do not count themselves will not get counted. If not being heard at the State & Federal level bothers you, if you do not like being passed up for federal funds that could have helped Polk County prosper, or if you are tired of being overlooked by businesses branching out into other areas (I know we all want a movie theatre at the very least!), then it is time for you to step up and help raise awareness in our community. You don't have to be a census worker to help us spread the message.

Shape your roads. Shape your community. Shape your schools. Shape your future.
Be counted!