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**Program Summary of 2020 HTC Census Outreach Efforts**

**Submitted by**

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The Ohio Voter Fund and our fiscal sponsor, the Promise of Democracy Foundation would like to thank the Cleveland Foundation and its grant making partners; Complete Count CLE, Cleveland Votes/Greater Cleveland Neighborhood, Commit2CLE, and the Ohio Census Advocacy Coalition, (OCAC), for supporting our Census 2020 community engagement and outreach efforts. Please find a summary of our activities related to our specific outreach to Hard to Count (HTC) communities that began in mid February and concluded on October 15, 2020. As an addendum to this summary, please find copies of OVF flyers and outreach materials from our various outreach programs as an addendum to this report.

1. **Milestones: A Recap of Phase II OVF Census 2020 Field Operations**

Ohio Voter Fund (OVF) in partnership with our fiscal agent the Promise of Democracy Foundation (PDF) conducted a modified Ohio Health Department compliant Census 2020 field outreach program in conjunction with our pre-established partners. Utilizing a total of 8 canvassers and volunteers, OVF field teams placed Census 2020 literature in high traffic locations within our targeted zip codes: 44118, 44121, 44110, 44112, 44106, 44108, 44120 and 44128. Our areas of concentration were the cities of Cleveland, East Cleveland, (Mount Pleasant, Woodhill, Lee-Harvard), Euclid, and Cleveland Heights.

OVF printed and distributed over 1,450 pieces of Ohio Voter Fund branded or co-branded US Census literature “Shape Your Future,” “Census at a Glance.” And “Census 101” color flyers that were used for neighborhood canvases. Beginning in early July OVF put together Census Packets which included flyers and a face mask provided by our partnership with *Cleveland Votes*, *Third Space Action Labs* *Masks4Community.com.* The number of masks distributed to date total over 700. We were also able to provide hand sanitizers, masks and gloves to all OVF staff and volunteers.

OVF also participated in a number of community outreach events in East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights throughout the month of September in partnership with NOAH, Zagara’s Marketplace, the Windermere Renaissance, ATHEM, the East Cleveland Public Library, Stephanie Tubbs Jones Community Health Center, ALDI Groceries, Park Towers, Zelma George Recreation Center, Forrest Hill Shopping Center, and the City of East Cleveland Office of Mayor Brandon King. OVF’s Census 2020 Coordinator Regina Smith was able to push greater census participation in East Cleveland on two of Mayor King’s Town hall meetings in August and September. Please see attached initial field reports from OVF’s Census Coordinator Regina Smith as an addendum to this report.

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**Changes in Scope: Modified Covid 19 Compliant Field Outreach**

Beginning in early August, OVF extended its Census field and digital outreach efforts to include voter registration and information dissemination on Early Voting and Absentee Voting. OVF became an active participating partner with Comitt2CLE for *National Voter Registration* Day where we were able to register a total of 131 new voters at our partner sights. Efforts begin in mid- September and concluded on October 5, 2020. During this period PDF/OVF continued to coordinate with community partners to identify and conduct *social distancing compliant* census outreach in the remaining hard to count precincts that were reporting the lowest percentage of responses.

The campaign utilized our experienced canvas teams to conduct outreach to community centers and households located in precincts with low response rates including East Cleveland, Mt. Pleasant, the Kinsman/Woodhill, Lee-Harvard, and the City of Euclid. The Phase III campaign’s goal was to reach an additional 1,150 households from these targeted precincts beginning August 1, 2020 through October 1, 2020. We were able to well surpass this goal through our multiple community outreach strategies and expanding on existing and new partnerships.

1. **Development of Phase II Digital Communication and Text Messaging**

Thanks to the support of the Cleveland Foundation’s Cleveland Census Rapid Response Fund, the Promise of Democracy Foundation and the Ohio Voter Fund was able to develop and launch a Census 2020 Digital Education and Awareness campaign. The sites are updated on regular basis and will continued thru October 31, 2020. Digital Campaign Highlights Include:

* Development of OVF Facebook/Twitter Accounts Highlighting 2020 Census and NVRD
* Development and Posting of OVF Branded Census 2020 Flyers and materials
* Promise of Democracy Web Site Enhancements on Census 2020 Educational Materials
* promiseofdemocracy.org Census Campaign launch inc. Greg Moore blog on Census 2020

**Text Messaging Program**

In addition to this OVF voter registration data, OVF has worked with Ohio Voice, OCAC and has signed a vendor subscription with *Spoke* to provide technical assistance to our text messaging program. We have identified a phone list of residents from the targeted zip codes pulled from the Ohio Voice Van. Those residents were sent customized text messages that included links to the US census to complete the census 2020 survey. The date for this effort was moved to mid-August as a re-enforcement to the beginning of the US Census enumerators field canvassing efforts and the OVF virtual phone banking.

OVF dramatically expanded its outreach to low response voters in Cuyahoga County by launching a text messaging program utilizing the *Spoke* tool. With technical support from Ohio Voice via our designated VAN, a total of 9,900 text messages were initially sent (between September 22nd and October 5th) to voters with cell phones urging them to register to vote, verify their registration status before the October 5th deadline and complete the census survey. This was followed by a second round of text messaging to 11,100 low performance registered voters in our targeted areas with a message exclusively urging them to complete the U.S. Census before the revised October 15th deadline. In the overall text messaging program OVF scored a contact rate of 82.8% and response rate of 2.5% as reported by the Ohio Voice.

**Phase III Digital Outreach Plans**

**Virtual Phone Banking**

Specifically, our revised Phase III plans called for accessing data from OVF’s VAN and targeting actual residents from HTC zip-codes who have been registered to vote by the OVF field teams since 2016. Data from the VAN included a universe of targeted households drawn from zip codes: 44118, 44121, 44110, 44112, 44106, 44108, 44120 and 44128. Customized phone scripts were developed emphasizing the connection between much-needed funding for human needs and the importance of responding to the census before the September 30th, October 31st and eventually October 15th deadlines.

**Voter Education and Issue Awareness**

OVF partnered with the League of Women Voters to distribute 3,500 voter guides throughout our targeted community. The voter guide included information on Issue # 68, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s School Levy. The Ohio Voter Fund utilized the same approach used in conducting neighborhood-based census and voter education on this important issue. OVF continued to utilize our community partnerships to place voter guides in high traffic areas and at special events held in conjunction with NOAH and other community partners. OVF staff and volunteers continued our outreach strategies to *reach the people* *where they are.* Throughout the entire process our entire team remained confident in our ability have an impact on both the Census 2020 response rate and the voter awareness and turnout in the 2020 Elections.

OVF utilized personalized messaging to encourage residents to fill out the Census form. We were able to use several of the pdf templates that the census provided to encourage people to complete the census. We were able to post this information in high traffic areas for as many people to see as possible during out outreach campaign.

Having special treats and giveaways was an effective way to spread the word and increase awareness. We were able to offer a tasty baked treat to those who completed the census in the 200+ Park Towers apartment Complex of our Census Director Regina Smith. We were also able to deliver over 700 masks for the community to each person’s doorknob which included information on the census, Covid 19 and voting. This was done during the height of the summer pandemic rise in cases so the giving away of free masks became an important component in our outreach strategy.

1. **What was unique about your community East Cleveland?**

East Cleveland and the surrounding targeted zip codes is made up of a number of established community-based groups and organizations that the Ohio Voter Fund had the opportunity to Partner with. They included NOAH, (the Northeast Ohio Alliance for Housing), the East Cleveland League of Women Voters, the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Health Center, the McGregor Senior Center, Windermere Renaissance, (Community Development organization), the City of East Cleveland Mayor Brandon King and Members of the East Cleveland City Council, the East Cleveland Public Library, and the East Cleveland Growth Association. These groups all were helpful with assisting with getting the word out for the 2020 Census during these difficult times.

By partnering with these groups OVF was able to seamlessly continue our outreach work by supporting their various activities and adding a Census Awareness component to many of their events throughout the year. All of the aforementioned groups were committed to spreading the word about the importance of the census. In the case of NOAH we were able to partner on placement of census articles in their newsletter, yard sign distribution, and co-sponsoring of a strategically place billboard in an East Cleveland neighborhood at the intersection of Eddy Road and Euclid Avenue.

1. **Critique of U.S. Census 2020 Outreach Strategies and Lessons Learned**

1. Community Outreach works best through partnerships with other groups prioritizing the Census. This avoids a lot of duplication especially among partners who were also grantees or who were not grantees but were still willing to offer their assistance.
2. Building awareness was greatly enhanced by the use of personalized messaging and reaching out to people as they went about their day to day routines, rather than creating events for them to attend. This was very challenging during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic.
3. There was a lack of general knowledge about the census and the role in plays in community development and financial resources.
4. It was unclear to many residents if they had been counted or if they were allowed to respond individually to the census.
5. Heads of households were the main respondents for the census notifications in the mail. If however you were not self-identified as a “head of household” (as was the case with the overwhelming majority of people in East Cleveland and other HTC communities), you were less inclined to feel responsible or take the initiative to complete the census. It would also make you reluctant to respond to official government questions regarding the household that you may not have responsibility for. This was especially the case for transient African American men.
6. In conducting the census there appears to be an overreliance on household data verses individual data. Census questionnaires are geared toward identifying inhabitants of households. But for many underserved communities, survival dictates another paradigm. This was particularly the case for African Americans who may not identify with one permanent household, or may be in difference stages of unofficial homelessness, i.e. they are not tied to maternal or paternal parents, but may have alternative short term living arrangements.
7. Because of the displacement caused by the pandemic many young people were also thrown into the HTC category. In the case of college students, many were displaced during the initial rise of the pandemic. By April 1st Census Day their household was more difficult to define during the acceleration of Covid 19. There was confusion on whether they should include their parent’s/ relative’s home, their campus address or current place they were residing with friends.
8. **Recommendations for your organization and other groups mobilizing for Census 2030**

What would you tell your future self if you were doing census work in 2030?

1. Start the community outreach Earlier (at least one year or more out).
2. Make Census Education a multi-year public awareness campaign.
3. ID new strategies to get people to respond as individuals and not as households.
4. Track the data that is being released in the years following the census and study it as a community to ascertain its accuracy.
5. Hold public forums to help educate opinion leaders in the census and re-apportionment process.
6. Commit to an expanded and if needed flexible time for enumerators to go to households and not just at the end for ongoing community engagement.
7. Plan for conducting the census during environmental emergencies which may be commonplace in 10 years due to climate change and other pandemics or unknown factors.
8. Continue to fund community-based organizations to help educate and raise awareness of the census within their selective communities. Early investments will be key.
9. Develop strategies to more closely connect participation in the US census to the Reapportionment and Redistricting Process.

**Acknowledgements and Summary**

Despite our inability to dramatically increase the response rates in Cleveland and East Cleveland past the 2010 rates, we believe our outreach programs were impactful. It was such an uphill battle attempting to reach out to the residents here in East Cleveland and especially with most of them being our most vulnerable our elderly. Also, the lack of technology and knowledge of computer's and lack of internet service in many homes made this effort more challenging. With the constant expansion of the Covid 19 infections it was difficult reaching seniors with comorbidities from vulnerable communities.

If COVID never happened, how would you advise yourself? We would have moved ahead with our original field outreach strategies that were set to begin in the early part of the year. We would have accelerated the amount of in person events especially in the spring and summer months when the weather was very mild. We would also have accelerated out community education and awareness programs as we moved closer to the deadline.

Leadership team involved in conducting Census outreach

**Greg Moore**, President and CEO, Promise of Democracy Foundation (Fiscal Sponsor)

**Regina Smith**, Ohio Voter Fund Census 2020 Program Director

**Dave Holt,** Treasurer, Financial Oversite, Promise of Democracy Foundation

The Community Outreach field team included Marion Jones, Sharla Jenkins, Pauline Hurt, Rasheen Smith and Areyonne Jordan. OVF’s Digital/Text Messaging Program; Jon Slosser and Antoinette Wiley.

The success of our program was due to the tireless efforts of our Census 2020 Team led by OVF/PDF Founder Greg Moore and Census Program Director Regina Smith and the OVF field team and volunteers. Finally, a big thank you to our sponsors and Regional Leaders at Cleveland Votes/Comit2CLE, Erika Anthony, Jennifer Lumpkin, and Devonte Dickey. They provided a tremendous amount of leadership and technical support throughout the entire process.

OVF staff was able to attend every Regional in persons and zoom meetings and OCAC trainings. We were also able to participate in all the Cleveland Foundation’s Census Town Hall Meetings. A special thanks to Juan Galeano of the Cleveland Foundation and McKenzie Merriman with CompletecountCLE, as well as the staff of the Ohio Census Advocacy Coalition (OCAC) and Ohio Voice. Your collective financial support, guidance and leadership throughout the entire project was much appreciated. We look forward to our continued partnership as we continue to strengthen and empower our communities.