

## **Count Me In: A Summary of the Long Island 2010 Census Initiative**

In mid-2009 representatives of the Long Island (NY) philanthropic community, covering Nassau and Suffolk Counties, began to explore ways of encouraging broad nonprofit cooperation in the 2010 Census, specifically to increase the participation of hard to count (HTC) populations in traditionally HTC communities. The grantmakers formed a funders collaborative which developed the Count Me In: Ten for '10 Long Island 2010 Census Initiative, based on the model established by Illinois funders. Membership included the most significant philanthropic organizations on Long Island—the Hagedorn Foundation (HF), the Long Island Community Foundation (LICF), the Rauch Foundation, the Roslyn Savings Foundation, the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, and the United Way—in addition to the national organization Public Interest Projects and an anonymous donor. The collaborative generated \$335,000 for regranting to Long Island nonprofits.

Conversations between members of the funders collaborative and the Nassau County Executive resulted in the establishment of a Nassau County Complete Count Committee that included all relevant county agencies as well as all members of the funders collaborative and representatives of the business community. As a result of this partnership with county government as well as of parallel collaborations secured by funders, eight businesses offered or contributed substantial in-kind services:

- WLIW dedicated airtime to public service announcements promoting the census to young African American men, considered to be among the hardest to count populations
- Cablevision dedicated airtime to other public service announcements promoting the census
- LIPA included information about the importance of participating in the census in its newsletter sent to residents with their electric bill
- North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System printed and distributed census outreach posters and brochures for display in all of their hospitals
- Sneakerology donated sneakers valued at \$600 and Brooks Brothers donated ties valued at \$750 for community organizations to use as incentives for filling out the census form
- Blu Line Media donated ad space for census promotion in 600 Nassau and Suffolk County buses
- Anton newspapers offered unused ad space for census promotion

On August 11, 2009, Count Me In released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to the Long Island nonprofit community, inviting proposals focused on promoting and increasing census participation in designated HTC geographic areas in which groups had clients, constituencies, and track records. Count Me In received 22 proposals (and solicited several more) requesting more than \$815,000. The committee made

grants to 15 organizations totaling \$335,000. Given the discrepancy between the need and the available funds, the Hagedorn Foundation chose five of the nonprofit organizations that had applied for funding and developed a joint proposal to the New York State Complete Count Grant Program, which awarded grants totaling \$99,454 to two of the organizations for outreach and mobilization activities and \$71,077 for a Long Island-wide media campaign. HF funded the remaining three organizations, made mini-grants to organizations that chose to sign a Memorandum of Understanding and work with the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials in its census campaign, and funded two other organizations that were working independently of the collaborative with grants totaling \$171,060.

### **Activities of Grantees**

The variety and creativity of the outreach methods of many of the organizations was impressive. Whether groups were knocking on doors and telephoning nearly every home in a particular community, or setting up tables and distributing flyers in front of supermarkets, delis, laundromats, and train stations, they found ways to reach tens of thousands of people. Many organizations worked through local houses of worship, schools or day care centers; many organized festivals, fairs, and breakfast or dinner meetings, drawing community members to the events through food and fun, while distributing information and/or speaking to the crowds about the importance of the census. In a few cases local elected officials collaborated with organizations, speaking about the importance of being counted at public events. Many organizations became official United States Census Bureau Partners, allowing them to serve as Questionnaire Assistance Centers and/or Be Counted Sites where residents could get a census form if they had not been sent one or suspected that their landlord had not included them in the household count.

### **Results and Looking Ahead to 2020**

Given the severity of the recession locally; extremely high Long Island foreclosure rates; a large undocumented immigrant population facing public hostility, police harassment, and unprecedented levels of federal raids; and trust in government at a nearly all-time low point, it is a testament to the power of collaboration that the mail participation rates in localities where Count Me In made grants to local nonprofits, response rates jumped—dramatically in some instances—from six percentage points in North Amityville to 21 points in Central Islip. By contrast, a quick look at communities where Count Me In grantees did no outreach shows falloffs in nearly the same proportions. Long Island’s overall mail participation rate, as measured on April 27, 2010 on the USCB website, fell by one percent from the 2000 rate.

Without the collaboration among Count Me In funders, grantees, Long Island businesses, and elected officials, it is extremely unlikely that rates in HTC areas would have been as high. The single broadest collaborative funding initiative undertaken by the Long Island philanthropic community, Count Me In suggests the possibilities of future collaboratives around issues of common concern.