

Column: Why Florida needs an accurate census count in 2020

Billions of federal dollars and fair representation in Congress is at stake.

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Getting the count wrong would be disastrous to the needs of our diverse communities throughout Florida. Florida Nonprofit Alliance and Florida Philanthropic Network are coming together to talk about all things Census 2020.

Florida gets just one official chance each decade to count its population, making it critical that each and every resident is included during Census 2020. Mandated by the U.S. Constitution, data collected by the decennial census will determine the number of seats Florida has in Congress and will be used to distribute federal funds both to the state and to our local communities. Without an accurate count, Florida stands to lose billions of dollars and could be underrepresented in Washington for the next decade. Our state also gained two congressional seats because of the 2010 count, and we are projected to gain as many as two additional two seats in 2020.

Floridians are being called upon to engage in a shared commitment to ensure an accurate 2020 Census through full participation by all our residents. Florida receives \$29.3 billion as a direct result of our 2010 census numbers, representing one-third of all state expenditures.

To put this into perspective, if the Census Bureau does not conduct a full and accurate count, Florida will suffer at multiple levels. Funding for our education services and programs will likely decrease. Urban planners need census data to know if a highway should be expanded or if more public transit is needed. Our state's roadway funding will be negatively impacted. Florida's agricultural communities might be affected when there is less federal funding for SNAP, school lunches and other federally funded nutrition initiatives. Health care dollars would certainly decrease, and access to medical services will be more challenging. Our state's overall infrastructure will suffer with unknown consequences to the greater business community.

The facts accumulated by the census are used not only by the government at all levels—they are used by all of us as business leaders, nonprofits and policymakers alike. Nonprofits utilize data for planning, resource development, targeting assistance to those in need and service delivery. Census data is part of our collective lives in a myriad of ways, and our local communities need these numbers to be as accurate as they can be.

We believe a count of all the state's residents is critically important for Florida. This will be the first time citizens will be asked to complete the census online. With a state as diverse as ours, many community leaders fear that this change will lead to a lower count of hard to count communities.

Nonprofits and funders care about a complete census count because it directly impacts the communities they serve. Join in the conversation — Census 2020 impacts Florida and it impacts all of us.

Bob McFalls is CEO of the Florida Philanthropic Network, which promotes, develops and advances philanthropy. Sabeen Perwaiz is CEO of Florida Nonprofit Alliance, which Alliance informs, promotes, and strengthens the nonprofit sector to create more vibrant communities across the state.