



YOUR COMMUNITY COUNTS

ORGANIZING TOOLKIT
FOR DATA EQUITY



The Leadership Conference
Education Fund

OCTOBER 2023

A person is seen from behind, holding a large white sign with both hands. The sign has the text 'FAMILIES BELONG TOGETHER' written in bold, black, hand-painted capital letters. A small black heart symbol is positioned to the left of the word 'TOGETHER'. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a public gathering or protest. The entire image has a purple color overlay.

FAMILIES
BELONG
♥ TOGETHER

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome and Purpose of the Toolkit

Welcome to The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s Community Partner Toolkit on Equitable Race and Ethnicity Data Collection. This comprehensive resource has been crafted to empower and educate our current and future partners and allies on a crucial issue that lies at the heart of civil rights and social justice: equitable race and ethnicity data collection in government forms.

In a world where data drives decision-making, shapes policies, and underlies algorithms, the need for accurate and comprehensive information on race and ethnicity cannot be overstated. As our society faces persistent racial disparities and systemic inequalities, it is essential to have the tools to advocate effectively for equitable data collection practices that can help create solutions.

For the most part, public conversation and prevailing media coverage fail to recognize the importance of equitable data collection. A thorough analysis of earned media coverage and public conversation on social media (see: “Race and Ethnicity Data Collection | In the Media”) from 2020 to 2023 found that the prevailing public narrative acknowledges obstacles to government data collection, but leaves out why this data collection is important and ways it could be improved. Though there are a few dedicated reporters, academics, and community advocates on data collection in government forms, detailed discussion of this issue is not a priority in mainstream debate. You can help change that.

Our Community Partner Toolkit is designed to equip you with the resources, messaging, and guidelines necessary to engage in meaningful discussions with press, thought leaders, and other prominent voices on this issue. By connecting the issues you work on to the need for accurate and inclusive data, you will be instrumental in driving understanding, support, and action towards policies that promote data equity.

At the heart of this toolkit is a shared vision of advancing civil and human rights for all. If we don’t participate in the process of data collection, we risk our stories being told for us — or without us entirely. By working together, we can make a profound impact on how our society approaches data collection and analysis, ensuring that it reflects the true diversity of our communities and informs equitable policies that leave no one behind.

Thank you for reviewing this toolkit. Your commitment as community partners and allies empowers us to make positive change and create a more just and prosperous country for generations to come.

About Us

The Education Fund was founded in 1969 as the education and research arm of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest and largest civil and human rights coalition of more than 240 national organizations. For more than five decades, The Education Fund has served as a force multiplier and amplified the call for a just, inclusive, and fair democracy.

Unpacking Race and Ethnicity Data Collection and Data Disaggregation – Why is it Important?

By ensuring that government data accurately reflect the diversity of all communities, we can gain a clearer understanding of the challenges that vulnerable groups face. Data serve as a powerful tool to identify disparities, address systemic inequalities, and design targeted policies that uplift underrepresented communities.

Current data collection policies and methods obscure our nation's full diversity, conceal disparities, and leave life-altering problems unaddressed. This deprives communities of the power to organize and advocate for a better future.



Consider the COVID-19 pandemic. Data on infection rates and health care disparities among different racial and ethnic groups underscore the urgent need for accurate information to address health inequities effectively. Equitable data collection also plays a pivotal role in tackling educational disparities, criminal-legal reform, voting access, economic opportunity gaps, and more. Without a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by various communities, we risk perpetuating systemic inequalities and hindering progress towards a fair and just society.

To achieve a more prosperous shared future, it is crucial to shift the public narrative surrounding race and ethnicity data collection. We must encourage open and constructive conversations about the significance of equitable data, dispelling myths and misconceptions.

By raising awareness about the importance of accurate data, we can inspire more people to become actively involved in this effort. Together, we can challenge outdated perspectives and embrace a collective responsibility for creating a society that values the voices and experiences of all its members.





MESSAGE FRAMEWORK

Race and Ethnicity Data Collection In the Media

To inform the design of the message framework, The Education Fund's Census & Data Equity team and our partners evaluated media coverage on the issue of race and ethnicity data collection in government forms (with a focus on the U.S. census) from January 2020 to May 2023. We wanted to discover what topics are of public interest and identify gaps in the media narrative. Though decennial census and American Community Survey results are cited frequently, our research made it clear that the process and approach to government data collection, especially the collection of race and ethnicity data, is not widely covered by mainstream reporters outside of breaking news. This gap reveals a need for community organizations to better engage reporters, decision-makers, and communities who can participate in this effort.



Key findings from our research

WHAT WE FOUND

Census results were almost always discussed using negative terminology — including “undercount,” “inaccurate,” or “missing” — suggesting that the census is an imperfect and limited tool.

From 2020 to 2022, there was consistent media coverage regarding whether the terminology used to describe cultural, racial, and ethnic identities — including AAPI, African-American, Hispanic, and others — accurately describes the American public. These conversations drew from existing census findings, but typically failed to suggest functional changes that would make the census more reflective of national identity.

Recommendations and solutions to update census data collection, if mentioned at all, were often buried near the end of articles. Articles and headlines regularly led with negative terminology, misleading information, or breaking news.

The census is highly politicized. Right-leaning voices labeled the census as a tool of the left to sway voting in their favor, while left-leaning voices argued that the right wanted to purposefully undercount communities of color and maintain a fictional “white majority.”

WHAT IT MEANS

Messaging needs to emphasize the value and importance of government data collection, while acknowledging its limitations.

There is a great need for advocates to push for changes to race and ethnicity categories on government forms that would better represent communities of color, and to discuss how better representation can help communities thrive.

There is an opportunity and need for stories that feature solutions to modernizing data collection front and center.

Messaging should avoid appearing partisan and focus on the benefits of ensuring all communities are represented.



How to Use the Message Framework

This message framework is a guide for talking about equitable race and ethnicity data collection. It features an overall narrative illustrating the importance of equitable data collection, four “pillars” addressing different aspects of the issue, further points in support of each pillar, and calls to action for various groups.

The goal of this messaging is to productively shift the public conversation around equitable race and ethnicity data collection. Your use of the framework ensures we all, as partners, are communicating a consistent and coherent message that can influence key stakeholders nationwide. The messaging was designed based on research findings, message development sessions with Leadership Conference staff, and feedback from a wide group of partner organizations.

It is important to note this framework is not designed for any one specific audience. Reaching elected officials, business leaders, reporters, and other organizations will all require a different and tailored approach. However, this framework is meant to equip advocates with the tools to speak persuasively about equitable data collection and address major issues and concerns effectively.

We encourage you to use this framework to prepare for meetings with key stakeholders, write emails or letters engaging important individuals, talk to reporters about equitable data collection, or outline the importance of this issue for potential partners who are unfamiliar with the topic. Pick and choose the points that your audience will respond to best, and always tailor what you choose to write or say with them in mind. For more on tailoring your message to different audiences and engaging stakeholders, see [Guidelines for Stakeholder Engagement](#).

Message Framework

NARRATIVE

Removing systemic barriers to opportunity for communities of color in the United States requires better data — both to understand problems and to create real solutions. Modernizing federal data collection standards is key to making progress. With granular, disaggregated data on race and ethnicity, we can inform good policies that help us build a more prosperous shared future for all. Inclusion and equity begin with understanding who we are.

VISION STATEMENT

The broad diversity of our nation must be fully represented in our shared future, so that all communities can thrive.

TOPLINE

People in the United States face systemic barriers to opportunity across racial and ethnic lines. We need accurate, actionable data about all communities to fully understand these barriers, protect our civil rights, and ensure equal justice and equal opportunity for all.



Key Messages: Pillars and Proof Points

PILLAR 1: THE PROBLEM

We don't have adequate and accurate data on communities across the country, particularly communities of color – a prerequisite to identifying inequalities and ensuring equal opportunity for all. The federal categories typically used to collect race and ethnicity data have not kept pace with the increasing diversity of our country, and do not reflect how many people self-identify. There is a growing movement to misconstrue or end data collection on race and ethnicity; this step would obscure racial disparities, work against race-conscious solutions, and perpetuate inequality.

Proof Points:

1. Federal racial and ethnic categories have not evolved sufficiently to reflect our constantly changing society, forcing many people to select categories in government surveys and forms that do not capture their identity. For example:
 - Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities currently do not have a category on federal forms, including the census.
 - Many people who identify as Hispanic and Latino do not see themselves reflected in the available racial categories on the census and other government forms.
 - Asian Americans are often unable to show their diversity due to a lack of disaggregated options that allow people to choose a specific identity.
2. Data collection is not simply about information. Current data collection obscures our nation's full diversity, conceals disparities, and leaves life-altering problems unaddressed. This deprives communities of the power to organize and advocate for a better future.
 - Communities of color are often distrustful of government data collection due to decades of systemic inequality.
 - Without accurate data, we fail to see disparities in access to critical resources, like health care; federal money for building schools, roads, and hospitals; and political representation.



3. Disparities in health outcomes are particularly pronounced, but the data we have now do not tell us a clear enough story to address them effectively.
 - Disparities in access to preventive care and treatment for COVID-19 are among countless examples of significant inequality along racial and ethnic lines.
4. A high percentage of respondents select the “Some other race” category on the census because they don’t see another choice that reflects their identity.
 - Increased selection of “Some other race” in the census impedes our ability to use actionable data and fully assess inequalities.
5. Anti-civil rights extremists are ardently opposed to modernizing data collection. This is part of a decades-long campaign against efforts to understand and address our country’s legacy of racial discrimination.
 - The Supreme Court’s decision to restrict race-conscious admissions in higher education is just one example of this movement’s increasing success in challenging race-conscious measures. While this decision does not affect demographic data collection, we anticipate attempts to extend the decision to improperly restrict data collection.
 - We need updated data collection to shed new light on persistent inequalities and truly understand our progress toward achieving racial equity.

PILLAR 2: ACKNOWLEDGING DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS

While our identities are complex, deeply personal, and cannot be truly captured on a form, allowing people to self-identify is the gold standard for collecting race and ethnicity data (and other demographic data) on government forms. Collecting these data can both illuminate progress and expose disparities that we can address to achieve equitable outcomes.

Proof Points:

1. Categories on government forms do not define communities; people do. While these categories do not define us, we appreciate the opportunity they provide: to work toward equal opportunity for all.
2. If people don't see themselves in a data collection form, they may not fill it out. Being undercounted can deprive communities of much-needed resources, deny them equal political representation, and allow civil rights violations to go undetected.
3. The way the government collects data will never be perfect or allow every single person to feel their identity is fully reflected, but we should strive to produce as accurate a picture as possible.
4. While more granular data cannot perfectly capture how each and every person or community self-identifies, every community will benefit from efforts to address disparities with concrete, meaningful solutions.



PILLAR 3: OUR SOLUTION

When we have information that accurately reflects who we are today, we can better advocate for the future we all deserve. People in the United States need to be able to safely and securely self-identify on government forms in a way that produces accurate and actionable data to inform good policymaking. While there is no “perfect” format to collect race and ethnicity data, there are key improvements that we can implement to make race and ethnicity data more inclusive, accurate, and useful. The federal government should modernize its data collection standards, and encourage state and local governments to follow suit.

Proof Points:

1. We need to update the categories on government forms to reflect how people in America self-identify today.
 - A combined question should include both race and ethnicity categories, and allow people to choose as many of either or both as they wish.
 - A MENA category should be added to government forms.
2. We also need disaggregated data in order to completely capture the richness and diversity within and across communities. e.g., the diversity of Asian Americans is obscured without disaggregated data.
3. We are all affected by the policies and solutions that are based on the data we provide. We need to educate and engage people on how data affect our daily lives, and why participation in the process of equitable data collection is important.
4. All of us are data users whether we realize it or not. As a result, we must bring people into the process of determining federal agency data collection standards – cultivating ambassadors, building trust, and ultimately improving the quality of race and ethnicity data.
5. We need to hold the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and federal agencies accountable for implementing and using revised standards, and educate state agencies on their benefits.

PILLAR 4: WHY THIS MATTERS

Modernizing data collection to reflect our diversity is key to building a more equitable society that can understand and address disparities in health care, education, voting, housing, transportation, and more – allowing all communities to thrive in a more prosperous shared future.

Proof Points:

1. Showing up allows us to tell our own stories – rather than risk others telling our stories for us. Ensuring we are all present in federal data sets and that our stories are recorded and acknowledged is fundamental to democracy. Disparities in health, education, voting rights, affordable housing, transportation access, and more will continue to exist as long as inadequate data collection leaves them unseen. People will concretely benefit from being better recognized on government forms, even if the way they are categorized is not perfect.
 - We cannot uphold federal and state civil rights law – in housing, employment, voting, education, health care, and more – without data to expose the existence of discrimination.
 - We rely on data all the time, and better data can allow us to improve people’s lives.
 - Data can tell us where textbooks, libraries, science labs, and technological resources are available in schools. Data can tell us about student enrollment and where educational opportunities are available.
 - Data can tell us who is and who is not voting, uncovering where we need to take action to support full participation in our democracy.
 - Data can tell us who does not have access to adequate health care, and help us identify where disparities exist so that they can be addressed.
2. We are still learning about the effects of structural racism on our society. More granular and disaggregated data can help us uncover and address disparities within and between communities that we don’t even know about yet.
3. A combined question will allow millions to choose a category that more accurately represents how they self-identify.

- A combined question would put race, Hispanic origin, and other ethnic categories in the same question, allowing respondents to select any and all categories with which they identify.
 - Hispanic and Latino Americans, people from the MENA region, and others will have options that better reflect how they identify.
 - A combined question creates more detailed data from which we can gain deeper insights.
4. Community involvement in this process will lead to more accurate data and increase participation in the census and American Community Survey, as well as other government surveys and data collection activities, in the future.
 5. Data collection must continue to evolve along with our society.



Calls to Action

POLICYMAKERS

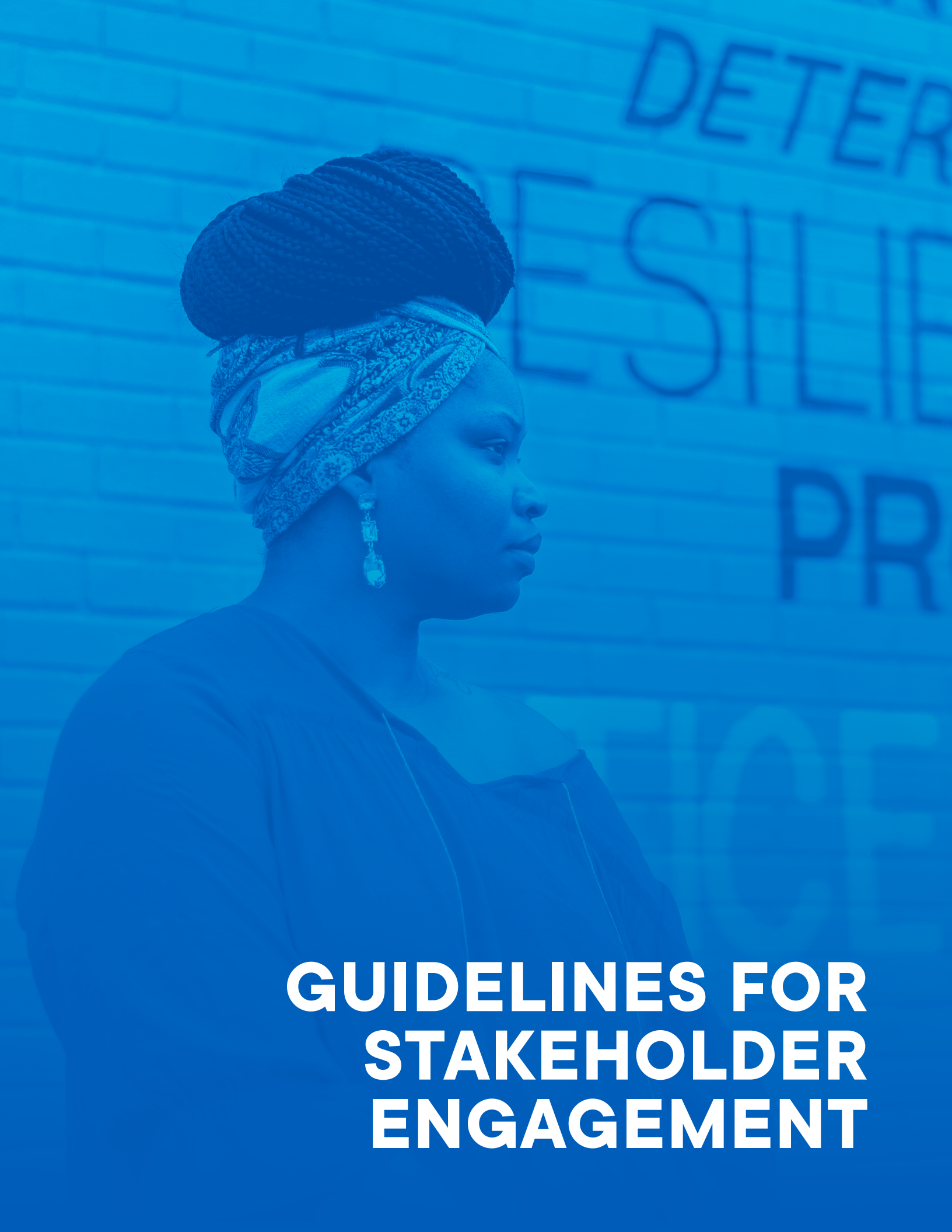
Support the collection of granular, disaggregated data at the state and national level by considering legislation and other policy changes to expand race and ethnicity categories, fully fund the U.S. Census Bureau and other data-gathering institutions, and use these data to design more inclusive, equitable, and effective policies.

JOURNALISTS

Recognize the importance of equitable data collection to issues like housing, employment, economic development, food security, education, elections, and more, and expand your reporting on these topics to include the need for more granular, disaggregated data.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Know that your voices are critical in persuading stakeholders to embrace modernized data collection standards and to increasing community participation in data collection. Engage with local elected officials, reporters, business leaders, and more to build community support around adequate data and ensure your identities are part of the story of our country.



GUIDELINES FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

With an understanding of the message you are trying to communicate, you are ready to begin engaging with key stakeholders in your community. These could be elected officials, reporters, partner organizations, business leaders, or anyone else with a role to play in equitable data collection. They may or may not be people your organization always agrees with.

Successful stakeholder engagement is about more than phone calls, emails, or letters. Building meaningful relationships is important, and it will allow you and your organization to be more trusted and effective community advocates.

Identifying Key Stakeholders

The first step to successful engagement is identifying who you need to talk to. Depending on your organization's mission and past work, you may be familiar with some key stakeholders already. Others may need to be sought out. Stakeholders can include:

- Policymakers, elected officials, and government officials in your area or at the state or federal level
- Reporters and media outlets that are influential in your community
- Community organizations and activists
- Business leaders and local or regional civic groups

You should also consider factors like demographics (age, gender, location), psychographics (values, interests, beliefs), and a person's level of familiarity with the topic. Conducting cursory research to understand your audience's needs, challenges, and preferences will also help to determine the most resonant message.

Speaking to Your Audience/Tailoring Your Message

Once you have identified your audiences, you can adapt the messaging framework into a unique, tailored message that best fits your stakeholders' interests. To craft such messaging, you should do the following:

IDENTIFY A CLEAR OBJECTIVE

Define your communication goals for each audience. Are you informing or persuading? Be clear about the outcome you want from your message.

LANGUAGE AND TONE

Use terminology your audience is familiar with and match your tone to their expectations: formal, informal, casual, professional. For example, some audiences may not be familiar with census or statistical jargon, whereas other organizations in the policy space may respond best to data-driven messaging.

EMPHASIZE BENEFITS

Focus on how your message benefits the audience. Highlight how your message addresses their pain points and offers solutions to their problems. For example, a business leader may be responsive to the idea of increasing economic growth, whereas reporters are often attuned to harm in their community.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES

Incorporate examples and stories that the audience can relate to, making the content more engaging. Stories of problems or successes in your own work help make your points more memorable.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Consider cultural differences and sensitivities when crafting your message. Avoid content that could be misinterpreted or offensive to certain groups and ensure that proper explanations are given to accompany group-specific data.

Strategies for Effective Engagement

Being an effective messenger takes time and patience. You may find it difficult to win over allies, or when you are able to build new relationships with people and organizations, it may take time to find an opportunity to work directly together. For more on how to build consensus and take action, see Conclusion and Action Steps.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT CHANNELS

Identify the communication channels your audience prefers (email, in-person meetings, formal letters, social media, etc.). Use these channels to deliver your message for maximum impact, customizing messaging to channels. This could include infographics and flyers for community outreach or formal briefs for legislators and policymakers.

LEVERAGING PERSONAL STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS

Insert your organization's unique perspective into the existing messaging framework. Highlighting real-life examples or data your organization has access to will help drive a more compelling (and often more relatable) message.

PARTNER WITH LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS

Build community around the issue of equitable data collection and approach key stakeholders together. Other organizations or individuals may have existing relationships or their own unique insights that will help persuade your audience.

START WITH BROAD AGREEMENT, THEN MOVE TO ACTION

Approaching a new stakeholder with an expectation for immediate action, like a demand to vote a certain way or write a story immediately, may risk pushing them away. Instead, take a more general approach and try to secure someone's agreement to take this issue seriously, identify some core shared principles, and work together in the future. Build on your success later when there is an opportunity to align on a more specific call to action.

A photograph of a city street with a large crowd of people. In the foreground, a person is holding a large sign that reads "MAKE EQUALITY REALITY". The person is wearing a light-colored jacket and a dark backpack. The street is lined with tall buildings and has various signs and traffic lights. The overall scene is a busy urban environment during a public gathering or protest.

MAKE
EQUALITY
REALITY

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

The following section contains resources that may assist you in your advocacy. These include additional data and research from The Education Fund, samples and templates for advocacy materials, further reading, and case studies of successful advocacy on data collection reforms.

In addition to the materials in this toolkit, the following publications from The Education Fund may help you explore data collection issues more deeply and gain insights that help engage and persuade the people you are trying to reach. This includes information on the U.S. census, redistricting, and other important topics.

From The Leadership Conference

- Data for Equity: A Review of Federal Agency Equity Action Plans | April 2023
<https://civilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Data-For-Equity-Report.pdf>
- Resources on OMB Race and Ethnicity Data Standards Revisions
<https://civilrights.org/edfund/omb-standards-revision-resource/>
- Data Disaggregation Action Network
<https://civilrights.org/edfund/data-disaggregation-action-network/>
- Roadmap to the 2030 Census | April 2023
<https://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Roadmap-to-the-2030-Census.pdf>
- Information Nation: The Need for Improved Federal Civil Rights Data Collection | April 2022
<https://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Information-Nation-2022.pdf>

From Our Partners

- The Quality of the Decennial Census for Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Communities: An Expanded Approach | Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC | March 2023
<https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/publication/quality-decennial-census-asian-american-and-native-hawaiian-and-pacific-islander>
- Yalla Count MENA In
<https://yallacountmenain.org/>

- Census 2020: What is the census? | NALEO Educational Fund | 2020
https://hagasecontar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NEF_2020_Census_101_EN_2.pdf
- The Importance of Accurate Census Data for the Latino Community | NALEO Educational Fund | 2017
<https://naleo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2017-Hispanic-Origin-Race-Brief-05-17-1.pdf>
- Power on the Line(s) | NAACP Legal Defense Fund, MALDEF, AAAJ-AAJC | 2021
https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FINAL-LDF_04142021_RedistrictingGuide-22e.pdf
- Lessons from the 2020 Census | National Urban League | 2020
https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/NUL_Census_Report_2020_final.pdf

Sample Letters and Templates for Engaging Stakeholders

These templates may help you get a head start reaching out to stakeholders. For best results, we recommend customizing the below based on your own work and the stakeholder you are contacting. See Guidelines for Stakeholder Engagement of this toolkit for more on tailoring your message.

Sample Email or Letter Requesting a Meeting

Dear [NAME],

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am writing to share with you the importance of ensuring our community is appropriately represented in state and federal data sets.

My organization, [YOUR ORG NAME], works in our community to [YOUR ORG MISSION]. We are concerned that inadequate state and federal data collection is a factor leading to communities being undercounted or our diversity being erased. Without change, we risk being denied the resources and political representation we need to thrive.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue and how we can work together to ensure our community is fully represented.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION]

Pitch for a Reporter

Hello [NAME],

My name is [YOUR NAME] with [YOUR ORG NAME]. We are a local organization that works to [YOUR ORG MISSION].

Recently, we have become concerned with inadequate state and federal data collection that may contribute to communities being undercounted or underrepresented. This could lead to [LOCATION] not receiving the funding and resources we need to thrive, or to certain disparities going unnoticed and unaddressed.

For example, [INSERT LOCAL EXAMPLE]. Our community relies on this support, and inadequate funding caused by an undercount could put us at risk.

This is an issue that could impact many people in [COMMUNITY], yet most are unaware of how important these data collection standards are. Could we meet in person or over the phone to discuss this further? I would also be happy to connect you with other local advocates who share these concerns.

Thank you,

[YOUR NAME]

Formal Stakeholder Letter Requesting Support on a Particular Issue

Dear [NAME],

We, the undersigned, represent community organizations in [LOCATION] writing to you about the importance of [EQUITABLE DATA COLLECTION OR OTHER ISSUE] in our community. Our organizations and missions are diverse, spanning [INSERT MISSIONS]. What we share in common is faith in our community and a desire to ensure we are fairly counted in state and federal surveys, fairly allotted political representation, and fairly distributed state and federal resources we need to help [LOCATION] thrive.

We strongly urge you to uphold your commitment to [INSERT PERSONALIZATION] by [SUPPORTING/VOTING FOR/CONSIDERING] [INSERT LEGISLATION/PROPOSAL].

While many may not be aware of [EQUITABLE DATA COLLECTION OR OTHER ISSUE], it is nonetheless extremely important to ensure [LOCATION] can access equitable and fair housing, medical care, transportation, employment, and more [OR INSERT OTHER ISSUES].

As we are sure you are aware, the need in our community is great. [INSERT STATISTICS ON COMMUNITY NEEDS] It is important to know that these numbers are only what we know now, with limited information. [EQUITABLE DATA COLLECTION OR OTHER ISSUE] will allow us to uncover more and better understand the progress and opportunity that remains ahead of us.

One example of [WHAT WE CAN ACCOMPLISH/WHAT IS AT STAKE] is [INSERT STORY FROM COMMUNITY].

Your [SUPPORT/VOTE] would make a significant difference in our community. Please [INSERT ACTION] now.

Sincerely,

[NAMES, ORGANIZATIONS]



Links to Relevant Publications and Articles

- Fact sheet: Why do we need a combined race and ethnicity question? | The Education Fund | April 2023
<https://civilrights.org/resource/faqcombinedquestion/>
- FAQ on OMB Standards | The Education Fund | April 2023
<https://civilrights.org/edfund/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/04/FAQOMBStandards.pdf>
- Changing how U.S. forms ask about race and ethnicity is complicated. Here's why | NPR | April 2023
<https://www.npr.org/2023/04/27/1170743721/omb-race-and-ethnicity-statistical-standards>
- Who counts as Black in voting maps? Some GOP state officials want that narrowed | NPR | October 2022
<https://www.npr.org/2022/10/18/1126287827/redistricting-supreme-court-louisiana-black-african-american>

Success Stories and Case Studies

The following stories illustrate successful efforts to change how data is collected. You may find them useful in illustrating the real-world impact we are moving toward.

Illinois Becomes First State to Count MENA Data

For years, leaders in the Illinois MENA community have objected to how the state counts people with MENA identity in their data collection and reporting. Like most everywhere else in the United States, Illinois expected the MENA community to self-identify as “white” — a category that obscured the community’s true size and the state’s true diversity.

It wasn’t just about a desire to self-identify: Arab Americans and people from the MENA region in Illinois have struggled for years with their community not being counted. COVID-19 offered a stark illustration¹ of the problem: While experts indicated that MENA people would be a high-risk group for contracting COVID-19 and neighbors attested to a high death toll, a lack of data collection for the group means no one knows the true extent of COVID’s impact on MENA people.

Responding to the concerns of advocates, State Representative Abdelnasser Rashid sponsored a bill to mandate the MENA category be used in Illinois data collection and reporting, making it the first state² to do so. The bill passed the Illinois legislature unanimously — a testament to strong community support — and was signed into law³ on August 4, 2023.

1. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/across-illinois-arab-americans-were-dying-from-covid-19-but-the-government-wasnt-counting-some-say-that-cost-lives/>
2. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/illinois-arab-americans-state-data/>
3. <https://www.illinois.gov/news/press-release.26835.html>

Invisible No More: Fighting For Accurate AANHPI Data Collection in New York

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) has led the Invisible No More campaign in New York for more than a decade, pushing both New York city and state governments to collect more accurate, disaggregated data about the AANHPI community.

“For too long, AANHPIs have remained invisible to our government,” CACF says. “We need data disaggregation because when AANHPIs are lumped into one singular group, our incredible diversity, strengths, and distinct needs are erased and rendered invisible.”



In 2021, New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation mandating the state collect more granular data on the AANHPI community, as well as disaggregate data for the most populous Asian American groups. CACF leaders Anita Gundanna and Vanessa Leung noted that the change would allow greater understanding of the “immense socioeconomic, health, educational, and other disparities within the AA and NH/PI community.”

The California Health Interview Survey: A Gold Standard

Created in 2001, the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is housed within the University of California’s Center for Health Policy Research. CHIS interviews more than 20,000 Californians every year, forming a representative sample of all 58 California counties and capturing the state’s diversity through accurate and complete collection of disaggregated data on race and ethnicity.

Legislators, state agencies, and researchers all rely on CHIS data to learn more about the health of Californians, creating opportunities for meaningful reforms to address the issues and disparities these data illuminate.

CHIS data uncovered a need for health care among undocumented youth that led to legislation extending Medi-Cal coverage to undocumented immigrants 19 and under.

WE ARE A NATION OF
IMMIGRANTS

INHUMANE TREATMENT
NO DEPORTATION
FAMILY SEPARATION
DETENTION

NO WALL

**NO HUMAN BEING
IS ILLEGAL**

**NATIONAL SECURITY
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**CONCLUSION AND
ACTION STEPS**

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Ensuring equal opportunity for all requires understanding who we are. We can't do that without accurate data — and we're not there yet. We need to both modernize the way our federal and state authorities collect data and increase participation in the process. The risks are too great for communities who are undercounted or whose identities are not captured.

Adequate data leads to actionable insights — which schools are not getting the funding they need, how health outcomes differ, who is or is not voting, whose civil rights are not being upheld and protected — that help us create meaningful change. The way we collect data will never be perfect, but it must change along with our society as we strive to create a more prosperous future where all communities can thrive.

Call to Action for Community Partners

The Leadership Conference Education Fund and our national partners are intensely focused on modernizing data collection standards from the federal to the state level. However, the voices of community organizations and the influence of community leaders are critical in creating the kind of change we need. Educating your own community members on the importance of equitable data collection, building relationships with allies and stakeholders, and reaching out to state and federal agencies with your own perspective are all ways to make a big difference. The future we envision will only come when decision-makers nationwide hear a broad chorus of voices demanding change.

We hope this toolkit has given you the resources to be a part of that chorus. The Education Fund is ready to support you, too. We hope you will engage in our shared mission to ensure equitable data collection through some of the following tactics and opportunities:

Build relationships with community leaders around a shared understanding of the importance of equitable data collection. No matter what you and your organization typically work on, your existing advocacy can be an important tool in bringing attention to equitable data collection. Elected officials, business leaders, reporters, and other key stakeholders are often sensitive to issues you may work on — such as housing, civil rights, economic development, and more — but may not know much about the importance of good data to solving these issues. You have the ability to connect the dots for them and create new allies for the cause of equitable data collection.

Work together with allies to learn more about the impact of data collection on your community — and advocate for change. Change will not happen overnight, and advocacy

is always more effective when you can coordinate with like-minded groups to multiply your efforts. It is also important to understand how your state collects and uses demographic data and how their methods could improve. Creating new partnerships and coalitions of allies will help you discover more about the problems your community faces or opportunities to make a difference. And when it comes to taking action, you can work together more effectively as a group with a diverse set of skills, connections, and resources.

Educate people on the importance of equitable data collection and increase participation in data collection opportunities when they arise. While modernizing the way we collect data is critical, community participation is just as important. Ensuring individuals can engage with data collection processes, start to build trust in those processes, and understand the need to participate will help ensure your community is counted completely and accurately — helping you to receive the resources you need and to learn more about disparities that may exist. You should also be ready to resist calls to not collect more accurate data, which may come from elected officials who oppose attempts to address racial disparities. Successful community engagement around the importance of equitable data collection can help you push back when critics seek to muddy the waters.

A sample action plan may look like the following:

- Request meetings with community leaders and key stakeholders — including fellow organizations, business leaders, and elected officials — to explain the importance of equitable data collection to your work, and get their perspective on how better representation in state and federal data might help your community thrive. Secure their commitment to continue engaging with your organization on this issue.
- Start a local coalition or working group composed of interested people and organizations who can help advance the cause of equitable data collection.
 - Meet regularly to discuss problems in your community and how inequitable, incomplete data collection may have contributed. Share insights from the work of each member that help everyone better understand data collection in your state and the organizations whose work is affected. Invite a reporter to sit in on your meetings.
 - Gather stories from people each coalition partner works with to gain new insights and help demonstrate to others why your work on equitable data collection is important.

- Outline opportunities to engage with state or federal authorities around data collection issues and discuss how your group could participate.
- Work with your partners to contact and meet with state or federal authorities, sharing your concerns and proposing solutions. Secure their commitment to work with your group on the issue. Contact local reporters and update them on your progress or roadblocks you are running into.
- When data collection opportunities arise, from the U.S. census to state and local surveys, engage with your partners on ways to get the word out and increase community participation. This may include hosting events, getting local media attention, or working with local officials to make the process smoother and more efficient.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund looks forward to partnering with you as we all work toward a more prosperous and equitable future for all communities.

Appreciation for Community Partners and Allies

The Education Fund and its sister organization, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, are proud to coordinate more than 240 national organizations in promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of everyone in the United States.

Our mission is simple: Build an America as good as its ideals. We need the support of thousands of people who help make change at the grassroots and community level: building the America we envision from the ground up.

We are endlessly grateful for all you do to promote civil and human rights in your community. Your work is the driving force behind all we accomplish together.

Contact Information for Further Assistance or Inquiries

The Education Fund invites you to contact us to share your questions and thoughts or to request further assistance. We are always here to be your partner. You can reach us at: datadisaggregation@censuscounts.org



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