

Building Civic Power

Lessons for Philanthropy from 2020 Census and Redistricting in Pennsylvania

by Erin Casey



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Commissioned by the William Penn Foundation and The Heinz Endowments, in partnership with the Census Equity Initiative and Fair Representation in Redistricting. *The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation or The Heinz Endowments.*

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With Gratitude

Thank you to the organizers, advocates, and funders who generously shared their time and insights for this case study. Your reflections and leadership brought this work to life. I am especially grateful to the many community leaders across Pennsylvania who made this story possible.

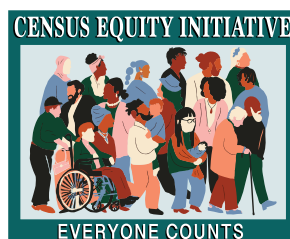
William Penn Foundation

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CEI is a funder collaborative that pools and aligns resources for census policy and operations, research, collaboration, and outreach, all with a focus

on communities that are persistently undercounted in the decennial census and American Community Survey, including people of color, young children, immigrants, and others. For more information, contact: info@censusequity.org



A Funder Collaborative for Fair Districts

FRR is a funder collaborative working to transform redistricting into a nonpartisan, non-political, community-based activity. FRR seeks to protect and expand the ability of communities of color and other historically underrepresented groups to secure district maps that fairly represent their communities. Learn more at www.fairredistricting.org

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Executive Summary

THE DECENNIAL CENSUS AND

redistricting are foundational to our democracy. Together, they determine political representation and how trillions in federal funding are distributed. A fair and accurate count ensures that every community, especially those historically underrepresented, has a voice and access to the resources it needs to thrive. Census data feeds directly into redistricting, the process that draws political maps from school boards to Congress. When done fairly, redistricting can strengthen democracy by ensuring that power is distributed equally across communities. When distorted, it can lock communities out of power for a decade.

In the lead-up to the 2020 census cycle, philanthropic organizations in Pennsylvania saw a unique opportunity to align their giving with the state's democratic needs. They formed new partnerships, supported trusted messengers, invested in civic infrastructure, and helped ensure every community was counted and represented. These efforts laid the groundwork for long-term civic power and delivered tangible benefits in areas such as healthcare, education, housing, and economic development.

This case study focuses on work led by Pennsylvania Voice (PA Voice) through the Keystone Counts coalition and Maps for the People campaign. While other efforts took place across the state, this study follows the evolution of PA Voice's work to trace one story over several years that shows how a grassroots-led vision, made possible by funders organizing around an aligned strategy, built lasting capacity for democratic participation.

Looking ahead to the 2030 census and redistricting cycle, the case for continued investment is clear. The challenges that communities face don't disappear. Strategic, sustained funding is essential to advance equity, strengthen collaboration, and support long-term democratic impact.

Local funders played a critical role in shaping and sustaining Pennsylvania's civic engagement infrastructure and plan. Their commitment and deep relationships grounded the work in community priorities and made it possible to coordinate across the state. That consistency gave national funders the confidence to invest in ways that were strategic, aligned, and additive, not fragmented or fleeting. It's how we started to move beyond the boom-and-bust cycle and toward something lasting.

—MATT BARRON, PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS



Grassroots leaders connected with neighbors to build power through a fair and accurate census. Photo Credit: ACHIEVEability

Key takeaways from Pennsylvania's census and redistricting work:

- **Start early.** Early investment created space for shared learning, strategic planning, and infrastructure building. Just as critically, it built relationships and trust among organizers, among funders, and between the two. That foundation supported stronger coordination and greater impact during the census and beyond.
- **Leverage the infrastructure you build.** Census was the spark that ignited the work, but it wasn't the finish line. Work on the census enabled community groups and funders to build new partnerships; it clarified links between data and representation; and it launched a longer arc of shared strategy around civic engagement, redistricting, and political power.
- **Keep community at the center.** Redistricting has too often been a closed-door process, seen as too technical or too political for community input. Pennsylvania flipped that script. Grassroots leaders drew maps, trained members, and testified at hearings, showing what's possible when the people closest to the consequences are part of the decision-making.
- **Statewide collaboration strengthens the ecosystem.** Campaigns like Keystone Counts and Maps for the People brought together dozens of partners across regions and issues, aligning strategy, avoiding duplication, and building the kind of scale and resilience that individual organizations couldn't reach on their own. Strong statewide infrastructure and coordinated in-state funding strategies gave national funders the confidence to invest their resources, as well.
- **Shift the narrative.** Redistricting, especially, must be reframed as a question of fairness, representation, and community power, not partisanship. Funders can support this shift by making redistricting a core part of their democracy portfolios and providing flexible, sustained funding to grow field capacity, leadership, and data expertise.
- **Funders can be catalysts.** Funders didn't just write checks—they moved others to act. Funders like the William Penn Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, the Samuel S. Fels Fund, and the Grable Foundation helped organize peer funders, hosted briefings, and kept the work visible and urgent. Smaller foundations proved that even modest, early investments can unlock momentum when coordinated with the field.
- **Build on what works.** Communities' successes in achieving a fair count and representative maps demonstrate the power of the model built in Pennsylvania: statewide relationship-building, coordination across the ecosystem, insightful use of data, targeted public education, thoughtful organizing by trusted messengers, and investment in narrative change—all aligned with and driven by community leadership.
- **Invest to empower communities for the future.** The powerful infrastructure that community groups and funders built together in Pennsylvania will be critical as we approach the 2030 census and redistricting cycle. Funders must continue to support and grow this infrastructure to ensure that communities can advocate fully and forcefully for their interests during the coming cycle. Funders can also help bridge the gap between cycles by supporting census, redistricting, and voter engagement as ongoing, integrated parts of community-based civic engagement work.

Introduction: A Changing Pennsylvania, an Unrepresentative Democracy

PENNSYLVANIA WAS CHANGING.

Growing Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Islander communities were revitalizing towns, fueling local economies, and shaping the state's future. But this new Pennsylvania was not reflected in its government. Extreme gerrymandering had long plagued the state, creating a disconnect between the legislature, which remained overwhelmingly white, and the communities it was meant to represent.

That disconnect was no accident. Gerrymandered maps at the state and federal level had diluted the power of communities of color for decades. In places like Berks County, growing Latino neighborhoods were split across districts, making it harder for residents to have a real voice in decisions that affected their lives. Public awareness was growing as it became clear how partisan interests had distorted the maps to influence elections. On January 22, 2018, the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court set a new precedent by ruling against partisan gerrymandering of Congressional districts, signaling a shift toward fairer redistricting practices.

The 2020 census and redistricting cycle offered a rare opportunity to make the state's democracy reflect its people. This was not just about representation. For communities that have been historically undercounted, the census was not just about filling out a form. It was about being seen. If people are not counted, their communities receive fewer resources, less representation, and less power to shape what happens next. It was also about equity. It was about power that could be leveraged for change in health, education, housing and economic opportunity. To get there, communities needed to be counted. And they needed to be represented. That meant organizing early and building the infrastructure to fight for fair maps and a fairer future.

The barriers were significant. The proposed addition of a citizenship question to the census caused fear and confusion, especially among immigrant communities. The Census Bureau was underfunded. The digital-first approach adopted for the 2020 Census excluded people without reliable internet access or digital literacy. And then the pandemic hit, disrupting the Bureau's field plans and timelines just as outreach was set to begin.

PA Voice, a statewide civic engagement organization and affiliate of State Voices, and its partners laid the foundation for a community-led census campaign known as Keystone Counts, bringing together grassroots organizations, especially those serving communities at risk of being missed. This initiative then set the stage for the Maps for the People redistricting campaign.

PA Voice, through Keystone Counts, built a coordinated, community-led strategy. Funders stepped in despite the uncertainty, some new to civic engagement, and aligned their support with the field's priorities. By centering flexibility, trust, and local leadership, they helped shape an approach that was both responsive in the moment and strategic for the long term.

The census numbers were so important for our community to be seen. Our population grew by 80% in the last 10 years. For the first time in 50 years, the population was growing in our region and that growth was being driven by our communities. This matters for the economic health and future of our region.

—MONICA RUIZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CASA SAN JOSE

Civic Power in Motion: What Organizers Made Possible

2016 - 2020: Organizing Early to Be Counted and Heard

In 2016, PA Voice and its partners recognized an opportunity to reshape the state's democracy, making it more reflective of the Commonwealth's communities. The goal was clear: to ensure fair and equitable community-driven maps. This effort wasn't just about counting people; it was about empowering communities and making democracy work for everyone.

The census was the entry point. It was the first step toward a stronger, more reflective democracy in the Commonwealth. It was also a chance to strengthen Pennsylvania's growing civic engagement infrastructure. PA Voice knew the work could create a pathway to bring in funders who had never been involved in civic engagement or broader democracy work. They understood that the census offered a clear and accessible starting point, one that helped make the case for deeper, long-term investment in community power.

In addition to census work, a smaller group of PA Voice members (CASA, Make the Road Pennsylvania, One Pennsylvania, and Common Cause Pennsylvania) also began strategizing for a fair, equitable, and community-driven redistricting campaign. They knew that redistricting was often seen as a partisan fight, but recognized the critical need for communities to reclaim the process from partisan actors and ensure the voting maps represented them.

In 2017, after laying the groundwork for the census campaign, PA Voice launched Keystone Counts,

a statewide campaign to serve as the statewide hub for census advocacy and civic engagement in Pennsylvania. It began building a Get Out the Count field operation leading up to the count in 2020. Rather than counties moving in different directions, PA Voice provided a unifying structure, offering tools, data, and coordination that brought more consistency and best civic engagement practices to the work. Local efforts remained rooted in the community, but they were strengthened by shared strategy and statewide insights. An undercount in one part of the state could affect census funding for all, making statewide alignment critically important.

What began with 27 organizations grew into a coalition of more than 100, mostly community-based groups rooted in the neighborhoods they served. These were the trusted messengers. They knew how to meet their communities where they were and how to navigate fear, language barriers, digital gaps, and deep skepticism around government data collection. The campaign also served as a catalyst for these organizations to learn how to engage data more effectively and build more sophisticated civic engagement programs.

Moving to Civic Action

It takes 7 to 12 meaningful interactions to move someone to act. Keystone Counts supplemented the work of the Census Bureau and country-level Complete Count Committees with a strategic, data-driven field operation that reached the most at-risk households through one-on-one outreach.

PA Voice played a central role, educating and training nonprofit leaders about the census, providing data and tools, and creating and managing the shared field plan. They offered one-on-one coaching, organized regular communication across the coalition, and hosted funder briefings to keep philanthropy aligned with on-the-ground efforts. Built on strong relationships, this foundation allowed the team to adapt quickly when conditions shifted.

When the federal government proposed adding a citizenship question to the decennial census in March 2018, Keystone Counts was already prepared and could mobilize fast to oppose it. They launched a statewide public comment campaign that brought in more than 3,500 letters to the Census Bureau from Pennsylvanians who opposed the change.

By 2019, the strategy had sharpened. PA Voice had identified 1.2 million households who were most at risk of being missed in the census without additional outreach and engagement. This was especially challenging because the proposed addition of a citizenship question had created deep anxiety in many immigrant and mixed-status households. Even after the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the question in July 2019, confusion lingered about whether it would still appear.

PA Voice developed a targeting tool that mapped this data at the county, municipality, ward, and zip code levels. They identified 24 counties where historically undercounted populations such as people of color, immigrants, and children under 18, especially children of color, were growing the fastest. These counties were categorized into tiers based on population density and growth to help guide and prioritize outreach.

The coalition developed a targeted civic engagement plan prioritized in-person outreach by trusted messengers and avoided duplication. The strategy launched early, in September 2019, and unfolded in two phases. The first phase focused on education. The second focused on mobilization with the goal of boosting self-response rates before census enumerators entered the field.

Of those 24 high-risk counties, the majority of the coalition's efforts were concentrated in 12 with trusted

Keystone Counts Strategy

1 Identify households most at risk of being missed in the census, using PA Voice mapping tool (1.2 million households across 24 counties with rapid population growth among under-counted groups like immigrants, people of color, children, and especially children of color).

2 Prioritize 12 counties with strong local infrastructure and existing relationships with coalition partners.

3 Deploy civic engagement plan: education followed by mobilization to boost census response rates. Use trusted messengers. Coordinate efforts to reduce duplication.

Results

- In 9 of 12 priority counties, self-response rates exceeded the state average.
- Groups' increased capacity and expanded community networks strengthened civic engagement infrastructure and amplified their voter registration, education, and turnout efforts.
- For groups, census data collection and analysis allowed them to see and demonstrate their power in new ways.

local partners. While support was available statewide, this is where the deepest investment and greatest impact were made.

The plan was designed to end in May 2020, when the Census Bureau would conclude the self-response phase. (After May, the Bureau conducts door-to-door visits for households that have not responded.) This timing allowed organizations to shift their focus to voter registration, education, and turnout for the 2020 elections. The transition from census outreach to voter

engagement was intentional. It was meant to build on the leadership development and capacity gains from the census and carry them into the nonpartisan electoral process. In doing so, groups created their own strategy to manage the typical boom-and-bust cycles of civic engagement by retaining staff, sustaining momentum, and seamlessly moving between campaigns.

However, in March 2020, the federal government, including the Census Bureau, shut down due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting census deadline extension, combined with the broader disruption, significantly impacted outreach efforts in Pennsylvania. Communities most at risk of being undercounted faced even greater challenges during this critical time. Door-knocking was no longer safe. In-person events were canceled. Outreach had to be reimagined in real time. Because the coalition had already built deep relationships and flexible outreach strategies, it was able to pivot quickly to phone and text banking. The work did not stop. In many places, it even accelerated.

This kind of rapid adjustment was only possible because of what had already been built. PA Voice had created the infrastructure to respond. Organizations leaned on each other. They shared tools and messaging. They stayed connected. And they kept going, focused on the shared goal of making sure every household was counted.

By late May 2020, Pennsylvania's statewide self-response rate reached 63.2%. In 9 of the 12 counties where Keystone Counts partners focused their outreach, they surpassed the state average.

By October 15, when self-response and field operations ended, Pennsylvania's final self-response rate stood at 69.6%. It was a strong result given the extraordinary challenges of the pandemic, even if just below the 70.2% rate in 2010.

The results show what is possible when trusted messengers lead the work. With coordinated and data-driven outreach, the coalition boosted participation even in the face of fear and a global pandemic.

2021 - 2022: Organizing for Fair Maps and Equitable Representation

Redistricting is one of the most powerful and often overlooked levers of community power. After the census, Pennsylvania organizers turned their attention to ensuring the maps reflected the state's people, not political agendas. PA Voice launched the Maps for the People campaign, focusing on the 2021 Pennsylvania House District reapportionment process. The campaign was led in partnership with seven PA Voice member organizations—CASA, Make the Road Pennsylvania, One Pennsylvania, Common Cause, Action for Climate Emergency (ACE), Amistad Law Project, and Campus Vote Project (CVP)—to drive community-centered engagement. It focused on counties with large Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Islander populations, where local organizing was already strong: Allegheny, Berks, Lancaster, Philadelphia, and York. In these counties, the efforts of Keystone Counts had already helped lay the groundwork for continued community engagement.

The campaign aimed to empower communities to advocate for fair, equitable, and community-driven maps while pushing for transparency and good governance in the constitutionally mandated Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) process. The LRC is a five-member body (the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate

We don't allow elections to be administered in a partisan way. So why do we allow the lines that define those elections to be drawn in a partisan way?

—SALEWA OGUNMEFUN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PENNSYLVANIA VOICE

who choose an independent to chair) responsible for drawing the boundaries of Pennsylvania state legislative districts. The campaign also helped shift the public narrative around redistricting, emphasizing racial equity and fairness over partisanship and politics.

This path from census to voting to redistricting was not accidental. It was the result of strategy, patience, and organizing grounded in sharp political analysis and a long game for building power. Fair representation does not start and end with elections. It starts with data. It starts with visibility. And it only works when the people most impacted are leading the way.

During the first phase of the campaign (April - August 2021), the groups pushed the LRC to be more transparent and accessible. Their advocacy helped increase public engagement, leading to additional hearings and language access services, and added capacity to a broader fight to count incarcerated individuals at their home addresses instead of prison facilities.

The groups harnessed the power of advanced mapping technology. While these tools had previously been used to facilitate extreme gerrymandering, they were now empowering communities to take control of the process. This shift allowed individuals to create and submit their own maps, challenging partisan manipulation and demanding fairer, community-driven districts. In total, community members drew 724 individual maps to identify and protect communities of interest, ensuring they were not divided in ways that could weaken their community voice.

The campaign compiled Unity Maps from the individual maps, outlining proposed district boundaries for state legislative seats across five counties. It then held a rally in Harrisburg, which included a press conference and the hand-delivery of the Unity Maps to the Chair of the LRC. In the final phase, the partners continued to advocate for fair districts and maps in LRC hearings, in the media, and to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. The campaign ended with victories in terms of gaining better Pennsylvania House maps more reflective of their communities and successfully influencing the media narrative.

By building power from the ground up, the field didn't just shape one moment. The groups involved intend to consolidate the gains made during their first redistricting campaign to continue fighting for reflective democracy and co-governance. They changed the rules for who gets counted, who gets heard, and who holds power in Pennsylvania's democracy.

What We Learned from the Field

- **Power-building starts before the moment of action.** Organizers didn't wait for the census to begin—they built relationships, planned ahead, and positioned their communities to lead.
- **Civic infrastructure is people, not just programs.** Staff and members grew their skills, confidence, and leadership—investments that will continue to pay off long after the count ended.
- **Organizing creates momentum that lasts.** Because the work was grounded in local relationships and strategy, it didn't stop when the census ended—it carried directly into redistricting and beyond.
- **Equity and visibility go hand in hand.** The field focused on reaching people who were historically undercounted, and ensured their voices shaped the maps that followed.



The Harrisburg rally marked years of organizing and strategy that equipped communities to demand racially equitable maps and lasting representation. Photo Credit: PA Voice

Philanthropy in Motion: How Funders Showed Up

2017 - 2018: Laying the Groundwork for a Fair and Accurate Census

A number of changes had reshaped Pennsylvania's civic landscape since the 2010 Census. PA Voice, with partners, had built a sophisticated statewide civic engagement infrastructure aimed at creating a reflective and inclusive democracy. Across the state, organizations had been forging deep relationships, collaborating to strengthen civic engagement and laying the groundwork for a unified statewide infrastructure. They identified a fair and accurate census and equitable redistricting as key strategies to advance a stronger, multi-racial democracy. Nationally, the Census Equity Initiative (CEI), a national funder collaborative, brought together funders to ensure a full and fair count in hard-to-reach communities. The stakes were high: an undercount could deepen inequities, distort political representation, and undermine the democratic process.

For many funders in Pennsylvania, the 2020 Census represented unfamiliar ground. Philanthropic engagement in previous decennial counts had been limited, and many funders had never supported census outreach or worked with civic engagement groups. As a result, they did not immediately see how the census connected to their broader missions, including key issues like health and education.

Recognizing the critical importance of a fair and accurate count, civic engagement groups in Pennsylvania began building strategic relationships with funders. This effort wasn't just about outreach; it was about fostering a shared understanding of the census' vital role in shaping the Commonwealth's future. The learning process was intentional, helping funders see

how the census connected to their missions and why it mattered beyond just a numbers game.

For some funders, redistricting felt more political or partisan, despite its deep roots in fairness, representation, and equity. PA Voice therefore made a strategic decision to lead with the census in its outreach to funders, knowing it offered a more accessible entry point. This approach successfully brought new philanthropic partners to the table. But it also meant there was less time to build the same level of understanding around redistricting. When the redistricting process began in 2021, fewer funders were prepared to step into that next phase of the work.

In the fall of 2017, the Philadelphia Foundation hosted a briefing to educate funders on the importance of the 2020 Census. National leaders from the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the CEI outlined the high stakes of the census and efforts to ensure everyone is counted. PA Voice highlighted the ongoing work with state partners, including their new Keystone Counts coalition, focused on building a statewide Get Out the Count plan.

Funders stepped up, mobilizing with both curiosity and purpose. Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia hosted a series of conversations and briefings to sustain the momentum of learning. In partnership with Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, they expanded these efforts statewide, creating a shared learning platform for funders across Pennsylvania. They also began to engage in discussions about how they could work together to achieve greater collective impact. Internally, foundation staff and boards began to see the direct connection between their missions and the need for a fair and accurate census. Funders also became active leaders, hosting education sessions within their own institutions and networks to spread the message and deepen their commitment to the effort.

Many funders pointed to research by Professor Andrew Reamer of George Washington University that revealed that every uncaptured person in Pennsylvania would cost the state \$19,700 in federal funding over the next decade. That data helped solidify funders' understanding of what was at stake. At the same time, PA Voice provided critical demographic analysis, identifying the counties and households most at risk of being undercounted. Together, this research and analysis, along with ongoing education efforts, laid the groundwork for a strategic, statewide census campaign. It gave funders the clarity to direct their support where it was most needed and maximize their impact.

Collaboration between national and state funders was essential to the success of Pennsylvania's census and redistricting efforts. National partners brought a broader context, shared emerging strategies from other states, and helped identify opportunities to align efforts for greater impact. Together, funders worked to design state-level investments that could leverage national dollars and create a multiplier effect. This shared approach strengthened both local and national efforts and reinforced the long-term infrastructure needed.

Pennsylvania foundations, including the William Penn Foundation and the Heinz Endowments, along with national funders, made strategic investments in PA Voice, which staffed the Keystone Counts coalition, expanded its reach, and developed a comprehensive field, advocacy, and communications plan to Get Out the Count. In addition to supporting statewide coordination, philanthropic funding also bolstered city and county efforts in places like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, enabling local governments to lead outreach efforts and help ensure a fair and accurate count.

As more groups joined Keystone Counts, funders heard directly from their grantees about why the census mattered and why their communities needed to be counted. It wasn't just about data; it was about ensuring that everyone was counted. The real momentum came through persistent follow-up: ongoing one-on-one conversations, regional calls, learning sessions, and quiet persistence. This steady engagement kept the census on funders' radar, ensuring it remained a priority during those critical mid-decade years.



2018 - 2020: Moving into Action for a Fair Count

In 2018, the groundwork laid over the previous years transformed into decisive action. PA Voice and its partners completed the Keystone Counts two-phase field plan, leveraging trusted messengers and proven civic engagement strategies to mobilize communities for the census. Governor Tom Wolf's establishment of the Commonwealth's Census 2020 Complete Count Committees marked the official launch of state and local efforts, with these committees serving as critical community messengers to drive participation in historically undercounted populations. What began as education and planning evolved into a full-scale, statewide movement. Funders, recognizing the stakes, stepped into leadership roles, making strategic investments that would ensure the success of the 2020 Census.

Pennsylvania funders played a pivotal role in the success of the Keystone Counts Get Out the Count field plan developed by PA Voice and its partners. Local and national foundations contributed \$3.5 million to support the statewide field plan, with PA Voice regranteeing \$3 million to Keystone Counts coalition partners for execution.

The Samuel S. Fels Fund demonstrated how even smaller foundations can make a significant impact when pooled with other funders. Recognizing the importance of early, strategic investment, the Fels Fund was quick to support the coordinated census work, catalyzing additional funding and fostering collaboration among other funders.

At the time, Sarah Martinez-Helfman, the Fund's then-President, leveraged her relationships and platform in the Philadelphia region to engage other funders, sharing board materials and insights that strengthened connections and expanded support. Her leadership continued with a call to action at the Philanthropy Network of Greater Philadelphia's annual membership meeting, setting the tone for other funders to invest in the 2020 Census.

In the western part of the state, the Grable Foundation took a leading role in supporting census efforts. About two years before the 2020 Census, the Grable Foundation, in partnership with Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, helped seed a pooled fund to support local organizations in engaging their communities in the census. As a foundation focused on children, families, and educators in southwestern Pennsylvania, the Grable Foundation recognized the direct connection between an accurate census and its grantmaking mission, leading them to become deeply involved in the effort.

Alongside Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, the Grable Foundation hosted quarterly funder meetings that gradually increased in frequency in the lead-up to the census. These meetings kept the importance

of the census at the forefront of funders' minds and provided a platform for education and collaboration. The pooled fund enabled foundations that may not have otherwise invested in the census to come together and make collective funding decisions. Both funders and experts brainstormed strategies to ensure an accurate count, building trust and relationships over time. These discussions helped the group navigate moments of tension or competing priorities while maintaining focus on the shared goal of a fair and accurate census. PA Voice shared knowledge, tools, and strategy with the pooled fund partners, who worked to stay aligned with the broader statewide effort. This coordination helped ensure local grants were strategic, complementary, and connected to the larger civic engagement plan.

The Grable Foundation also took additional steps to advocate for the census. Foundation President Gregg Behr became a vocal ambassador for the cause, [writing an article in Education Week in March 2018](#) on the importance of the census and how readers could help promote a fair count. Behr also co-chaired the Allegheny County Complete Count Committee and worked closely with the Census Bureau to develop strategies for increasing self-response rates. As Behr famously said, "The census is probably one of the unsexiest things that happens in a democracy. And yet it's so critically important." These efforts proved successful: despite the challenges of the pandemic and other disruptions, Allegheny County's self-response rate increased compared to the 2010 Census.

Working closely with Philly Counts, which was the city's official campaign to ensure a complete and accurate census, Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia helped launch the Action Fund to support trusted grassroots groups with small but critical grants. Philly Counts coordinated local outreach efforts, trained volunteers, and partnered with community organizations across the city. The grassroots groups funded through the Action Fund brought cultural knowledge, language skills, and deep relationships that were essential to reaching households most at risk of being missed. In the end, Philadelphia's final count exceeded the city's own internal projections, a significant achievement given the many challenges of the 2020 Census.

Our staff and board understood the stakes of the census, how much was on the line for the city and our democracy. We saw this as a moment for funders to step up and lead. By making an uncommon, multi-year commitment, larger than we typically make, we used it as a tool to organize other funders.

—SARAH MARTINEZ-HELFMAN, FORMER PRESIDENT,
THE SAMUEL S. FELS FUND

Over the years, as funders and community leaders learned and worked together, they built strong, trusted relationships. These relationships proved crucial when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and in-person events had to be halted. Funders and community leaders collaborated to develop new, creative strategies, ensuring that the momentum of the efforts continued. This collective ability to pivot to virtual strategies helped sustain the drive for a fair and accurate census, even in the face of unprecedented challenges.

2021 - 2022: Funders Supporting Fair and Equitable Voting Maps

The momentum from the census didn't fully carry over to redistricting. While many funders stepped back, seeing redistricting as too political or outside their core priorities, those who stayed understood that the fight for fair representation did not end with the census.

For organizers, fair maps were the next essential step in the fight for equity and representation. With continued support, PA Voice and its partners brought community voices into a process that had long been closed to the public. The William Penn Foundation and the Heinz Endowments continued their support, recognizing that redistricting shapes political power and long-term material outcomes, affecting everything from education and housing to environmental justice and public health. Their investment helped sustain the civic infrastructure built during the census and

There is immense power in ensuring the state legislature reflects the state's demographics. A fair and accurate count, paired with equitable maps, is crucial to making that reflection a reality.

—ANN MILLS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AGUA FUND

ensured that communities could stay engaged. They understood that redistricting should be a community-centered, nonpartisan process. Without strong nonprofit and philanthropic engagement, the process is more vulnerable to partisanship and gerrymandering.

A small number of funders additionally supported the legacy organization Committee of Seventy, which led broad public education efforts through its Draw the Lines campaign. The initiative helped demystify the redistricting process and engaged the public to submit more than 1,200 maps.

[Fair Representation in Redistricting](#), a funder collaborative established to support communities of color and other underrepresented people to engage fully and fairly in redistricting processes, also played a critical role. Their expertise helped Pennsylvania funders understand how the Legislative Reapportionment Commission was operating, especially as decisions moved into the courts. They provided insight into the national landscape and key players influencing the process in Pennsylvania, connecting local advocacy to broader legal and political dynamics.

What We Learned from Philanthropy

- **Early, local investment created the foundation.** In-state funders made the first moves—funding coordination, building relationships, and signaling that Pennsylvania was ready to lead.
- **National dollars followed local strategy.** National funders brought flexible support and broader perspective, but trusted local leadership and aligned with the existing plan.
- **Coordination inspired confidence.** Funders didn't need to pool their money to stay aligned—they shared information, stayed in communication, and helped move resources where they were needed most.
- **Sustained funding helped avoid the boom-and-bust cycle.** Because support didn't end with the count, the civic infrastructure held—and organizers were ready to take on redistricting and more.

From the Count to Fair Maps: Outcomes of Strategic Organizing and Aligned Giving

THE 2020 CENSUS WAS MORE THAN A moment. It was a turning point. The organizing and investment it sparked didn't fade when the count ended. It built lasting civic infrastructure, trained new leaders, brought new investment into the work, and gave communities the tools to stay in the fight.

On the ground, it carried directly into redistricting, where grassroots leaders showed up with a strategy, data, and a vision. Their efforts helped deliver the most reflective freshmen class in the Pennsylvania State House's history, with more lawmakers who look like and come from the communities they serve. It's proof of what's possible when communities lead and funders invest in the people and infrastructure that sustain civic engagement and democracy.

In the 2020 Census, [Pennsylvania's self-response rate was 2.6 % higher than the national average](#). In counties where Keystone Counts focused its efforts, including Allegheny County, the census response rate [increased](#) compared to 2010. That was not by accident. It was the result of intentional planning, relationship-building, trusted outreach, and coordinated, community-led work.

But this work was never just about one moment in time. It was about what came after.

Casa San José, a nonprofit serving recent immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America in Western Pennsylvania, used a tailored outreach strategy rooted in deep trust to help surface what had long been invisible to people outside the community: the Latino population in their region was growing. This was a game-changing revelation. Census data showed that while the region's overall population was declining, immigrant communities were growing, stabilizing demographics and fueling the local economy.

Our members live in some of the most underfunded school districts in the state. When redistricting made it possible to elect leaders who truly represent our communities, it changed what was possible.

—DIANA ROBINSON, CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MAKE THE ROAD PENNSYLVANIA

Across the state, groups that joined the census effort deepened their civic engagement work and expanded their leadership development. With coaching, training, and technical support from PA Voice, partners broadened their tools, clarified their role in advancing democracy, and built lasting capacity. The network grew from 35 to 58 permanent partners committed to building a multiracial democracy, and the voter engagement workgroup expanded to include 30 organizations, many of which now run nonpartisan voter registration and Get Out the Vote campaigns in every election. The census and redistricting campaigns became a launching pad for deeper organizing, stronger coalitions, and more strategic political education.

What began with getting counted continued with getting represented. Organizers trained their members, built policy knowledge, and engaged thousands of residents in a process that had previously been closed off and opaque. When the Pennsylvania Legislative Reapportionment Commission opened the process to public input, grassroots leaders were ready. Groups like Make the Road Pennsylvania trained members to understand how maps get drawn and how to testify effectively. Their members submitted draft maps, shared community testimony, and showed up for a process that had never been designed with them in mind.

I learned how to approach civic engagement more intentionally, and it helped us build stronger connections with our communities and other organizations.

—AHMET TEKELIOGLU, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CAIR-PHILADELPHIA

In Berks County, the final legislative map closely mirrored the proposals submitted by Make the Road Pennsylvania members. That kind of outcome shows what's possible when the people closest to the issue shape the solution.

New partners joined the work, like Amistad Law Project, a partner whose work focused on decarceration. They facilitated the work of Maps to the People, which supported the larger effort of ending prison gerrymandering. For years, Pennsylvania counted incarcerated people as residents of the prisons where they were held, rather than their home communities. This inflated the political power of rural, predominantly white districts and diluted

representation in urban communities of color.

Advocates in the redistricting coalition fought to change that. And they won. In a landmark decision, the Legislative Reapportionment Commission agreed to count incarcerated people with sentences under 10 years at their home addresses. This wasn't everything advocates hoped for, but it was a major step forward for racial equity and fair representation. The LRC voted for the partial end of prison gerrymandering in late August 2021.

The power built through the census wasn't limited to community organizing. It also shifted how funders saw their role in democracy work and in working with each other. The census pulled in new funders, connected issue-based work to the broader health of our democracy, and helped expand what was possible. PA Voice and its partners saw continued investment in their missions, with new relationships and collaboration extending beyond the census itself.

For example, Philadelphia Health Partnership—a foundation focused on health and well-being—joined the census effort and, through that work, built



a stronger civic engagement relationship with the William Penn Foundation. That relationship carried forward after the count, leading to new collaboration on local funder briefings focused on election protection and how to support nonpartisan democratic participation. The connections made during the census laid the foundation for this expanded collaboration, showing how bridges built across issue areas can be sustained and activated for future challenges.

The partnership between The Heinz Endowments in Pittsburgh and the William Penn Foundation in Philadelphia deepened during the census and redistricting cycles. By aligning their priorities and coordinating their giving, the two foundations expanded their impact beyond their usual geographic areas and helped strengthen statewide civic infrastructure. Their collaboration didn't end with redistricting. Both foundations went on to create new program areas focused on democracy, each with dedicated staff and funding. This lasting commitment underscores the long-term value of the relationships established during the census and redistricting efforts, as well as their potential to continue advancing democracy across Pennsylvania.

National funders also deepened their commitment. Groups like the Agua Fund and the Campbell Foundation saw the importance of the census and redistricting. They expanded their understanding of civic engagement. They offered flexible, general operating support that allowed community partners to lead and adapt as needed, reflecting a growing recognition that sustained democratic participation requires long-term, community-rooted work.

In addition to the philanthropic dollars, state and local governments made investments to ensure a fair count. The state provided \$4 million in state funding, and cities like Philadelphia provided \$1.5 million to support Philly Counts 2020.

This kind of momentum doesn't happen by accident, and it won't continue on its own. With the 2030 Census already on the horizon and continued threats to fair representation, now is the moment to reinvest. The civic infrastructure is here. The leaders are ready. What's needed is sustained, strategic funding to meet the moment ahead.

The Census touches everything in our society, so it's essential that this work includes broad and meaningful participation. What I've valued most is how it created space for every foundation—regardless of size or focus—to contribute. It helped me build relationships across the state and across institutions, deepening the connection between William Penn and Heinz and bridging regional and philanthropic divides. That trust and alignment made it possible for us to move together from census to redistricting.

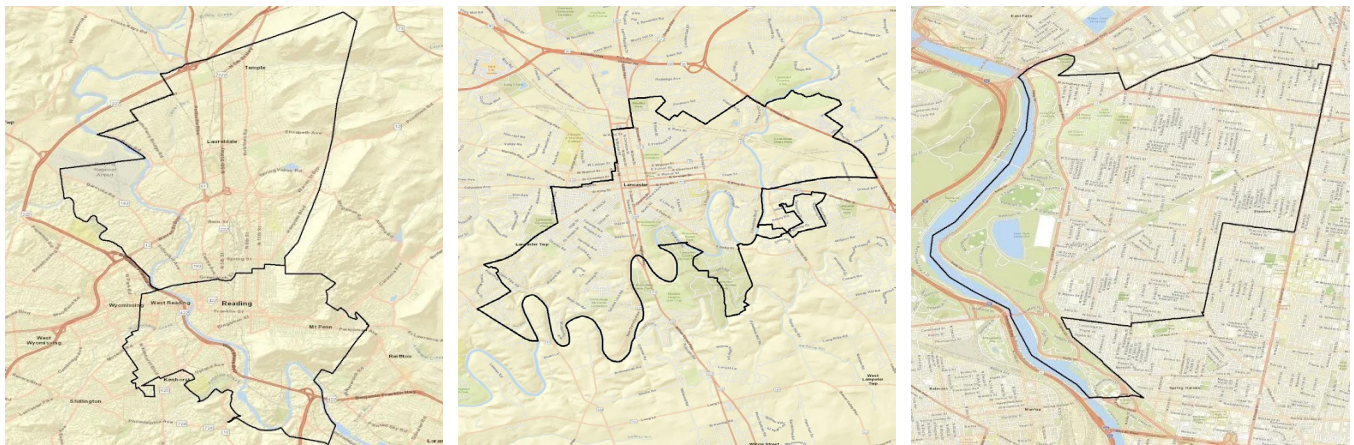
—JESSICA RICHARDS, PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION

What We Know Now: Lessons for the Road Ahead

THE SUCCESS OF THE 2020 CENSUS AND redistricting efforts has provided critical insights for future work. It showed what's possible when communities lead and philanthropy backs them with trust, flexibility, and long-term commitment. It also revealed where the gaps still are and what it will take to close them in future cycles.

These lessons don't just reflect what worked. They point the way forward for anyone who wants to build power that lasts.

1. **Start Early: Focus on Shared Learning, Planning, and Building:** Lasting impact starts well before the moment of action. In Pennsylvania, early investment created space for shared learning, strategic planning, and infrastructure-building—setting the stage for both the 2020 Census and redistricting. That groundwork laid the foundation for rapid response and long-term civic power.
 - **Leadership development is part of infrastructure.** Staff and members experienced deep growth—especially in areas like redistricting, data, and civic engagement—that strengthened the long-term capacity of grassroots organizations and the communities they serve. This kind of development made it possible for groups to lead strategically, not just participate.
 - **Funders evolved alongside the field.** Many entered the work with limited exposure to democracy issues. Through collaboration and shared learning, they began to connect the dots between civic infrastructure and their core missions and were better positioned to support and sustain long-term change.
2. **The Census Was a Spark, Not the Finish Line:** For many community groups and funders, the census was the on-ramp to something bigger. It created space for new partnerships, clarified the links between data and representation, and launched a longer arc of strategy around civic engagement, redistricting, and political power. What began as a push for participation became a movement for a democracy that actually reflects the people it serves.
3. **Community Voices Must Shape Redistricting:** Redistricting has too often been a closed-door process, seen as too technical or too political for community input. Pennsylvania flipped that script. Grassroots leaders drew maps, trained members, and testified at hearings, showing what's possible when the people closest to the consequences are part of the decision-making. Fair maps are only possible when community voices lead the way.
4. **Statewide Collaboration Strengthens the Ecosystem:** No single group or funder could have done this alone. Campaigns like Keystone Counts and Maps for the People brought together dozens of partners across regions and issues, aligning strategy, avoiding duplication, and building the kind of scale and resilience that individual organizations couldn't reach on their own.
 - **Pennsylvania needs a true statewide funding strategy.** Census data impacts every district. An undercount in one part of the state affects funding, representation, and redistricting outcomes across the board. Funders came to understand that working in isolation, whether by region, issue, or population, was not enough. Cross-state collaboration was essential and must be part of the strategy going forward.



Community members across Pennsylvania drew their own maps, showing the LRC that fair and racially equitable districts were both possible and necessary. Learn more about these unity maps at keystonecounts.org/unity-maps.

- **Local funders brought trusted relationships and staying power.** National funders contributed a broader context and flexible dollars. The civic engagement infrastructure and plan supported by in-state funders created a coordinated, nonduplicative container for national support. It signaled that Pennsylvania had its act together and that outside resources would be used well, not lost in the usual boom-and-bust cycle. That trust made a statewide impact possible.
 - **The result is durable civic infrastructure.** These relationships, skills, and systems are now part of Pennsylvania's democratic fabric and they'll be essential for the fights ahead.
5. **Funders Can Be Catalysts:** Funders didn't just write checks. They moved others to act. Foundations like William Penn, Heinz, Fels, and Grable helped organize peer funders, hosted briefings, and kept the work visible and urgent. Smaller foundations proved that even modest, early investments can unlock momentum when coordinated with the field. Their leadership created space for others to join and helped drive a statewide effort that wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

The Next Chapter Starts Now

AS WE MOVE TOWARD 2030, THERE IS A critical opportunity to build on the foundation laid by the 2020 Census and redistricting. While Pennsylvania has made significant strides, continued growth and investment are essential, especially in redistricting. Funders have a unique chance to act now, ensuring that the momentum from the census continues to strengthen democracy for the long term. Here are the key areas where funders can focus their efforts moving forward:

- **Critical Opportunity for 2030.** Pennsylvania's groundwork provides a solid foundation, but continued investment in both census and redistricting and a stronger democracy is vital for success in 2030 and beyond.
- **Empower Communities for the Future.** The census-driven organizing efforts should continue, and funders should support the infrastructure that has been built to ensure sustained civic engagement for years to come.
- **Actionable Strategic Investments.** Funders should focus on investing in education, organizing, narrative change, and relationship-building to make

redistricting more accessible and aligned with community values.

- **Redistricting and Democracy.** Redistricting is a critical element of democracy. It's not just about partisan advantage, but also about ensuring that communities are fairly represented.
- **Treat redistricting as essential democratic infrastructure.** Like the census, it requires early investment, long-term planning, and year-round coalition-building. Funders can help bridge the gap between cycles by supporting work that connects census, elections, and redistricting as part of one ecosystem rather than separate efforts.
- **Shift the narrative and invest in capacity.** Redistricting must be reframed as a question of fairness, representation, and community power, not partisanship. Funders can support this shift by making redistricting a core part of their democracy portfolios and providing flexible, sustained funding to grow field capacity, leadership, and data expertise.



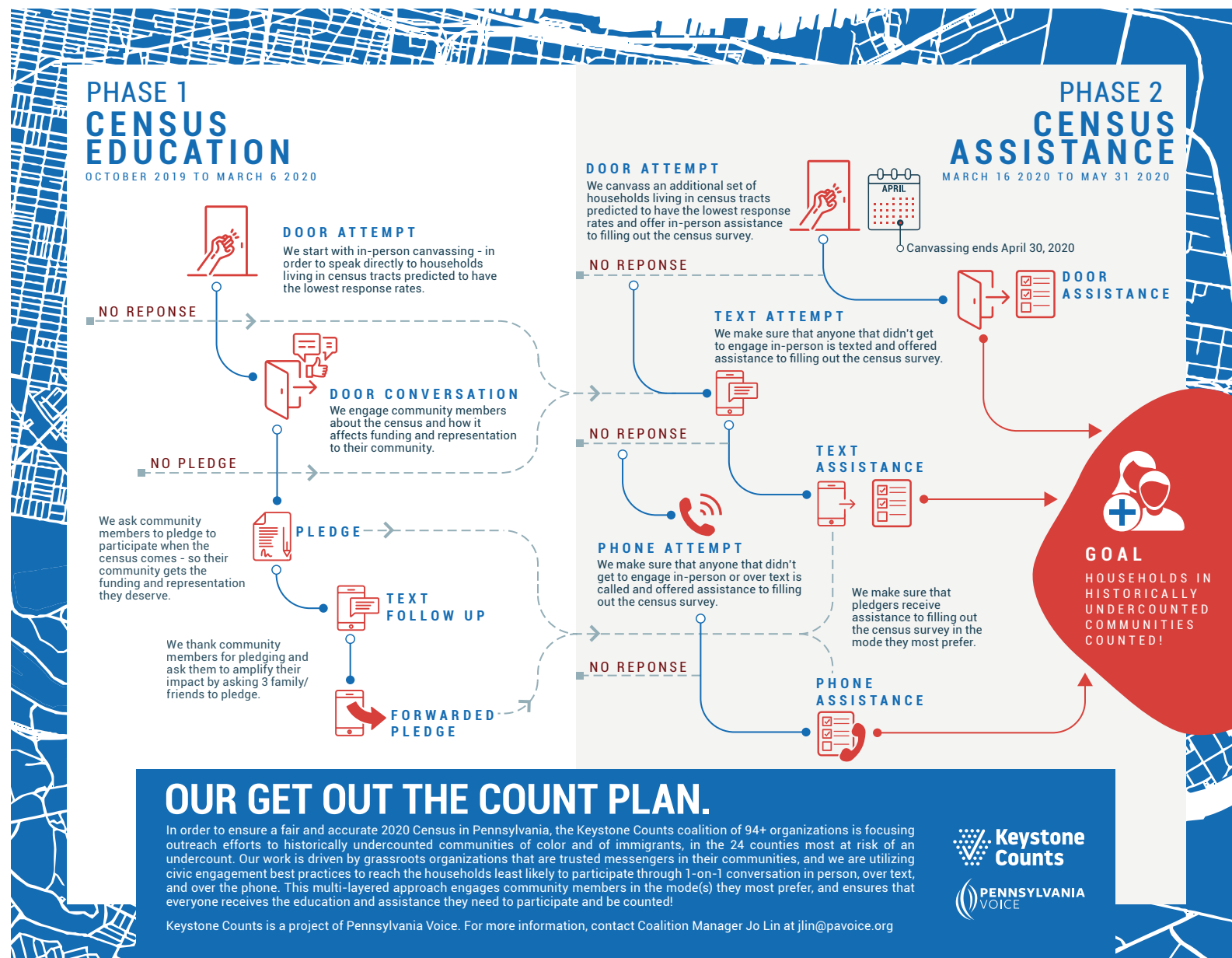
Membership-based organizations united to create shared maps that reflected their communities and demonstrated the strength of collective action. Photo Credit: Make the Road

Appendices

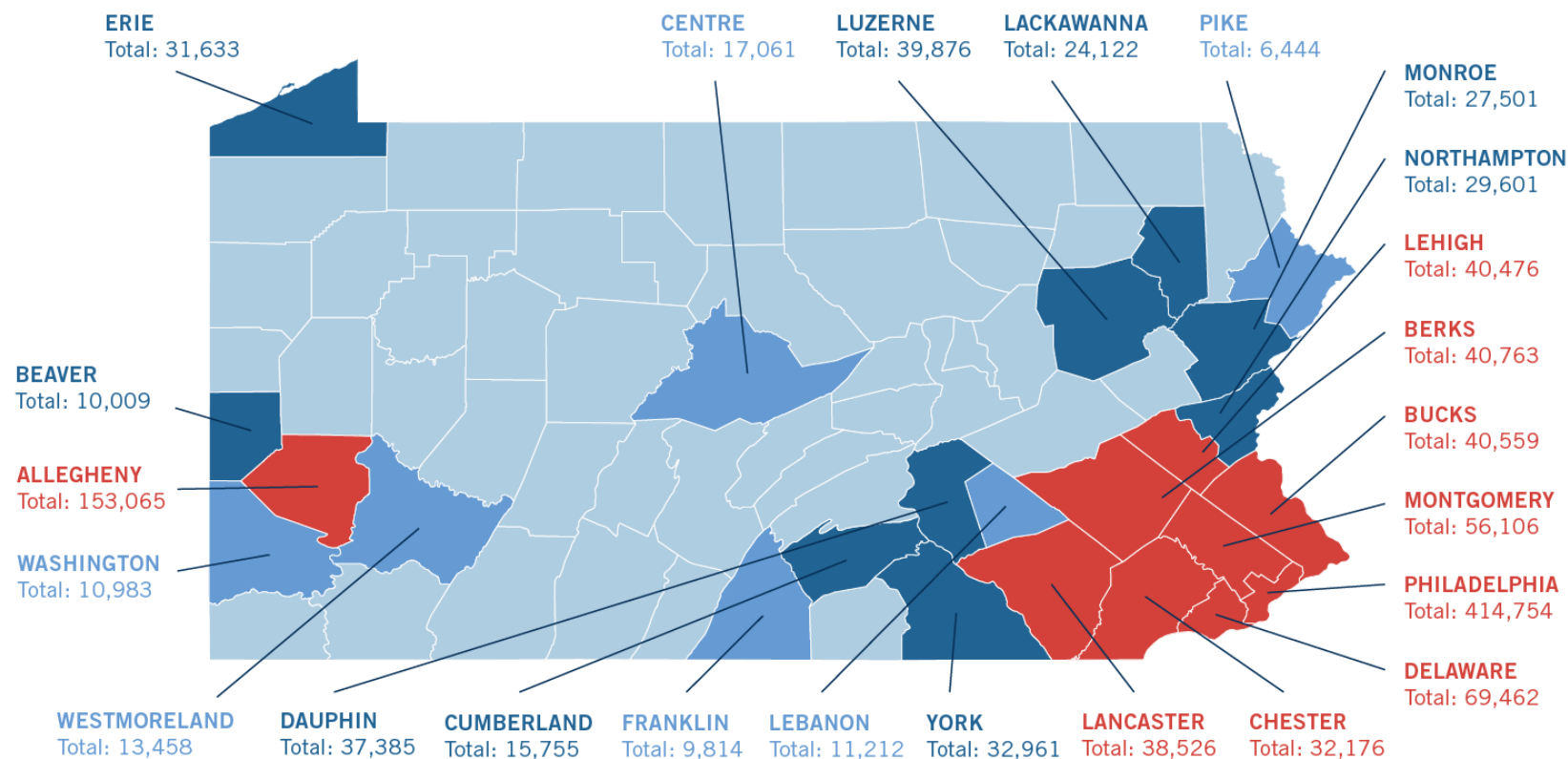
THE FIRST THREE APPENDICES FEATURE materials Pennsylvania Voice developed during the early planning years of the Keystone Counts campaign. These examples demonstrate how Pennsylvania Voice drew on its knowledge and civic engagement infrastructure to shape the 2020 Census effort. The pre-COVID-19 field visualization map highlights the sophistication of Pennsylvania Voice’s strategy and what it takes to move people to action, while the maps of priority counties and demographic changes demonstrate a deep understanding of Pennsylvania’s shifting demographics.

The final appendix is a graphic developed by Fair Representation in Redistricting and the Census Equity Initiative, mid-cycle, to demonstrate the relationship between redistricting, census, and voting, and how their healthy functioning supports thriving communities.

Appendix A: Keystone Counts Field Visualization (Pre-Covid)



Appendix B: Priority Counties & At Risk Households



Priority county tiers were determined based on the areas that experienced undercounts in the 2010 Census, along with growth in the historically undercounted populations of people of color, immigrants, and children under 18. At risk households were determined based on the Census Bureau model of predicting non-response to the 2020 Census by census tract.

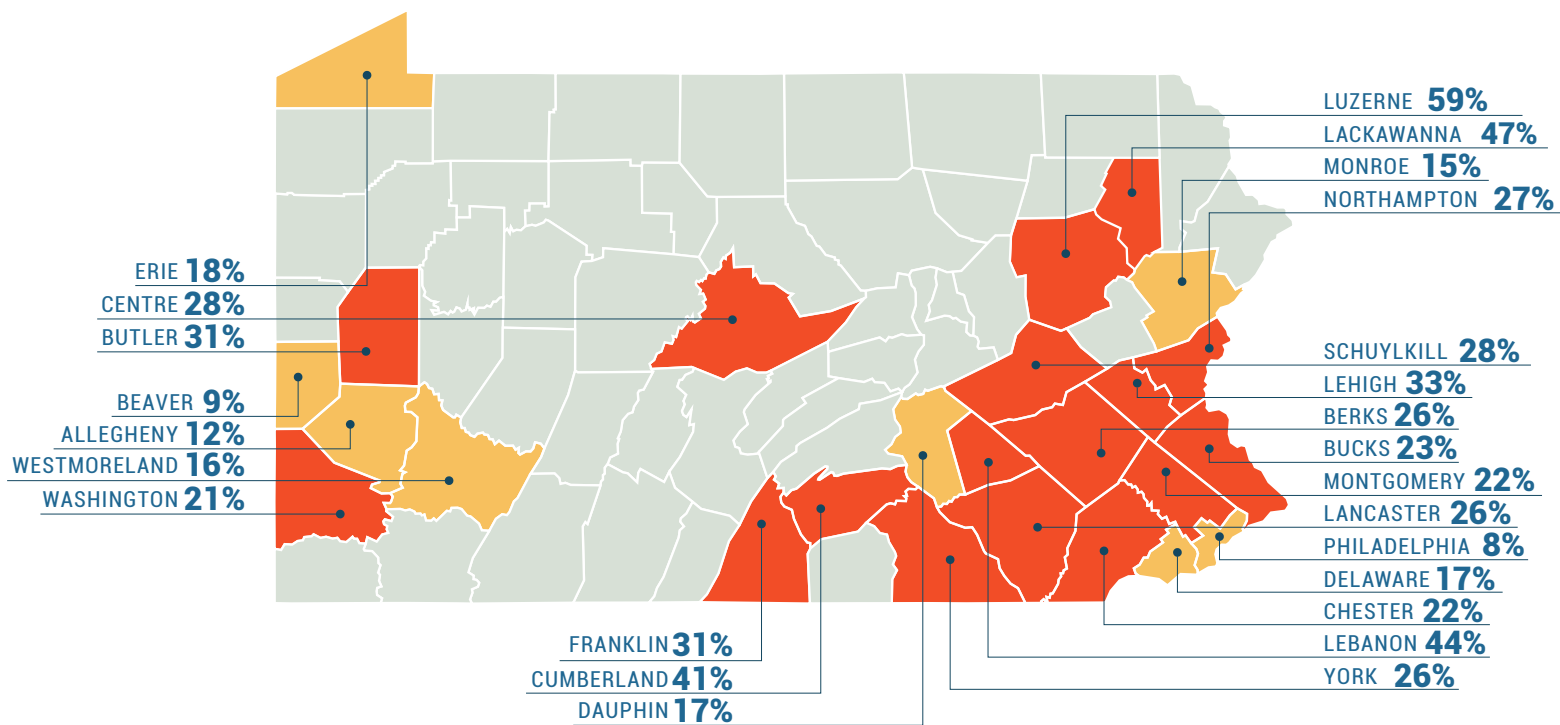
TIER 1
TIER 2
TIER 3



Appendix C: Changing Demographics – Growth of Communities of Color in Pennsylvania

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS IN PA

GROWTH OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR



This map illustrates the changing demographics in Pennsylvania. Across the commonwealth the total people of color population is growing faster than the white population. This map shows specifically the growth rate in the 25 counties that have the largest populations of communities of color in the state.

GROWTH RATE



Appendix D: An Integrated View of Civic Engagement

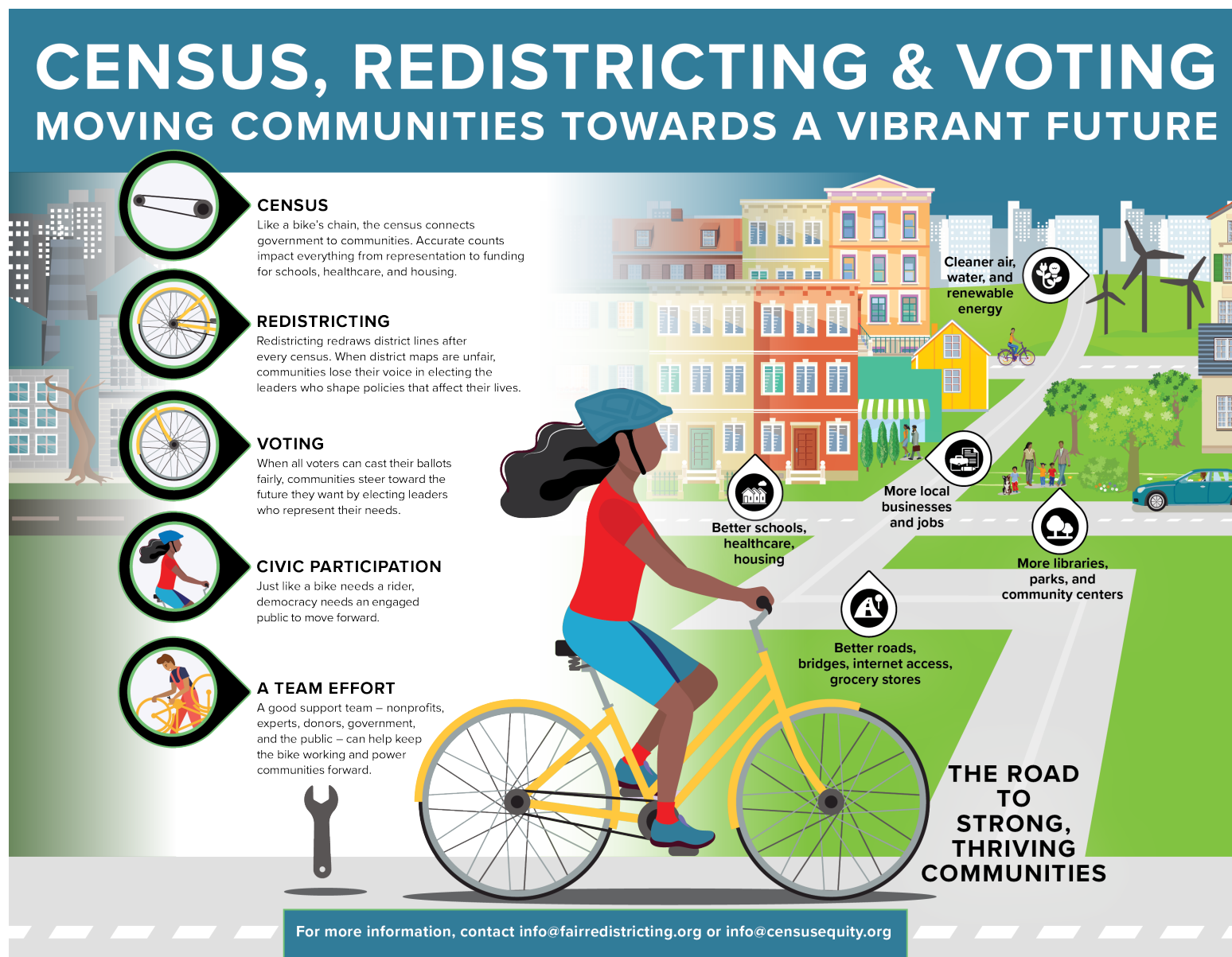


Image available for download and use [here](#)