

Census 2020: Making Western New York Count

Anna Blatto

What is the census?

The census is mandated by the United States constitution to perform a count of everyone living in the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas of the United States every 10 years.¹

Why is the census important?

The census is essential to developing accurate demographics for government actors and community leaders to understand how areas are changing. This contributes to good decision-making and policy change on education, housing, the economy, and other community-wide issues. Although the American Community Survey collects data on an ongoing basis, the census happens only once a decade. Data collected in the 2020 Census will be the basis of public decisions, plans, and research for the next ten years. For this reason, the census count must be accurate, valid, reliable, and fair.²

Census data directs resources and decides representation for communities. Around \$675 billion in federal funding is distributed each year across 26 agencies, based on the census.³ It is also used in the distribution of seventy-five percent of all federal grant money. In 2015, New York State received an allocation of over \$53 billion.⁴

Since population determines the number of state and federal legislators per area, census data is also used to redraw legislative and school districts and determine both state representatives and seats in the House of Representatives.⁵

This policy brief offers an overview of the 2020 Census: what it is and why it matters for Western New York.

It defines what is meant by "hard-to-count" areas or groups, and why it is important to achieve a fair and accurate count in next year's census.

The brief includes maps of undercounted areas in Western New York, highlighting Erie County and the City of Buffalo. It plots key community resources in these areas, including public library branches, immigrant and ethnic community groups, and neighborhood-based community groups and community centers.

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What is new about Census 2020?

New in the 2020 Census is the primary goal to generate the largest possible self-response either by phone, mail, or online. 2020 marks the first time all three methods will be used together and the first time the census can be responded to online. In addition, field operations are becoming automated and address and contact lists will be more accurate.⁶ By implementing these measures, the United States Census Bureau aims to reduce the number of households that require in person follow-up.⁷

The U.S. Census Bureau is advocating widely for online response, using targeted advertising on social media platforms, a tailored contact strategy, partnership programs with local community organizations, and a series of mailed notices.⁸ Eighty percent of households will receive an invitation to respond online with an overall goal of forty-five percent online completion.⁹ To make the census as accessible as possible, a pre-assigned ID is not required and phone support and online forms allow for data collection in multiple languages.¹⁰

How does an accurate count impact communities?

Census data affects funding for services and programs across healthcare, education, housing, transportation, and more:¹¹

HEALTHCARE

Census data is used to understand social factors that impact health and track the success of federal programs. Funding is provided for Medicare, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Health Centers Program, and Reproductive Health Programs.

EDUCATION

Census data is used to determine educational needs, challenges, and school district demographics. It also provides a broader understanding of employment rates of individuals by level of education. Funding is provided for Title I Grants, Adult Education, the National School Lunch Program, Head Start and Early Start programs, and Indian Education Grants to Local Agencies.

HOUSING

75% of all federal grant money is determined by the Census.

80% of households will receive an invitation to respond online.

Census data is used to understand factors in the residential housing sector. It is also used to determine Fair Market Rents critical to housing affordability programs and used to predict future trends. Funding is provided for low income renters through Section 8 Housing Vouchers, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, and other Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Census data is used to inform policy decisions and produce economic overviews of many industries. Funding is provided for national programs implemented at the local level (Section 8 Housing Vouchers, education grants, health centers) as well as Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grants, Community Services Block Grants, Community Development Block Grants, and the Rural Economic Development Loans and Grant Program.

MANUFACTURING

Census data is used to evaluate trends and determine manufacturing needs including price indices, labor force information, exports, and business characteristics. Funding is provided for the distribution of over \$10 billion to a variety of programs including the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, the Small Business Development Center Program, and the New Market Tax Credit.

TRANSPORTATION

Data collection is used to develop more adequate transportation planning, establish geographic trends in housing and transportation costs, and assess whether organizations and governments are complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Funding is provided for Urbanized Area Formula Funding and Formula Grants for Rural Areas, Federal Transit Capital Investment Grants, State and Community Highway Safety Grants, and the Federal Transit Metropolitan Planning Grant Program.

Census data affects funding for dozens of federal and local services and programs.

“Hard-to Count” Populations

Some groups have historically been undercounted in the Census. These “hard-to-count” groups include people of color, low-income families in urban and rural areas, immigrants and New Americans, those with limited English proficiency, Native Americans, single-parent families, and children under the age of 5.¹² When these groups are undercounted, it can change the distribution of funds and provide less funding to states with high numbers of hard-to-count individuals. This results in inadequate and unequal federal support for groups that are already traditionally marginalized.¹³

In 2020, several challenges will make it particularly difficult to count a few additional populations. Senior citizens, for example—a population not typically considered among the hard-to-count—may experience more difficulty with the increased push to respond to the census online. Those who identify as LGBTQ+ may be reluctant to complete the census, as it splits responses into two categories according to the gender binary of male and female and does not ask about gender identity or sexual orientation.¹⁴

Additionally, the Supreme Court’s decision on whether the census can ask a question on citizenship status is due in June 2019.¹⁵ This decision will impact whether immigrants and New Americans will be comfortable completing the census.

The City University of New York (CUNY) Mapping Center prepared Census 2020 Hard to Count Maps which allow users to examine hard-to-count areas and view related metrics such as percentage of households connected to the Internet, race, and levels of poverty, among others. It uses response rates from the 2010 Census to offer a numerical prediction of whether a census tract will be hard-to-count in the 2020 Census.¹⁶

Undercounting results in inadequate and unequal federal support for groups that are **already traditionally marginalized.**

Where do hard-to-count groups live in Western New York?

In our region, most hard-to-count census tracts are in low-income communities and communities of color (with high populations of both long-time residents of color and immigrants and New Americans). While hard-to-count areas are concentrated in urban areas, the most difficult to count zip code in Erie County is 14081, the Cattaraugus Reservation of the Seneca Nation, with a 2010 Census response rate of just over fifty-five percent.

In the 2020 Census, household access to Internet and Internet availability will be one of the most important factors for response rates. In certain areas in Buffalo and Erie County, there is a great deal of overlap between census tracts that are historically hard-to-count and households with no Internet access.

To explore the overlap of hard-to-count areas with Internet availability and community assets to achieve a complete count, the author compiled and created the following maps:

- Hard to Count Census Tracts in Erie County, Niagara Falls, Buffalo, and Lackawanna (page 6);
- Areas with low household Internet access in Erie County, Buffalo, and Lackawanna (page 7);
- Community assets in or near hard-to-count areas (page 8), including libraries, immigrant and ethnic organizations, and community centers and neighborhood groups. (These mapped assets are listed by category on pages 9-12.)

The map of hardest-to-count neighborhoods (where households were previously undercounted *and* where the most households lack Internet access) highlights the top ten zip codes containing the hardest to count census tracts in Erie County. The teal-shaded areas represent the top five hardest-to-count zip codes; it is important to note these are all east of Main Street.

In our region, most hard-to-count areas are in low-income communities and communities of color.

The most difficult to count zip code in Erie County is in the Cattaraugus Reservation with a **55.4%** response rate in the 2010 Census.

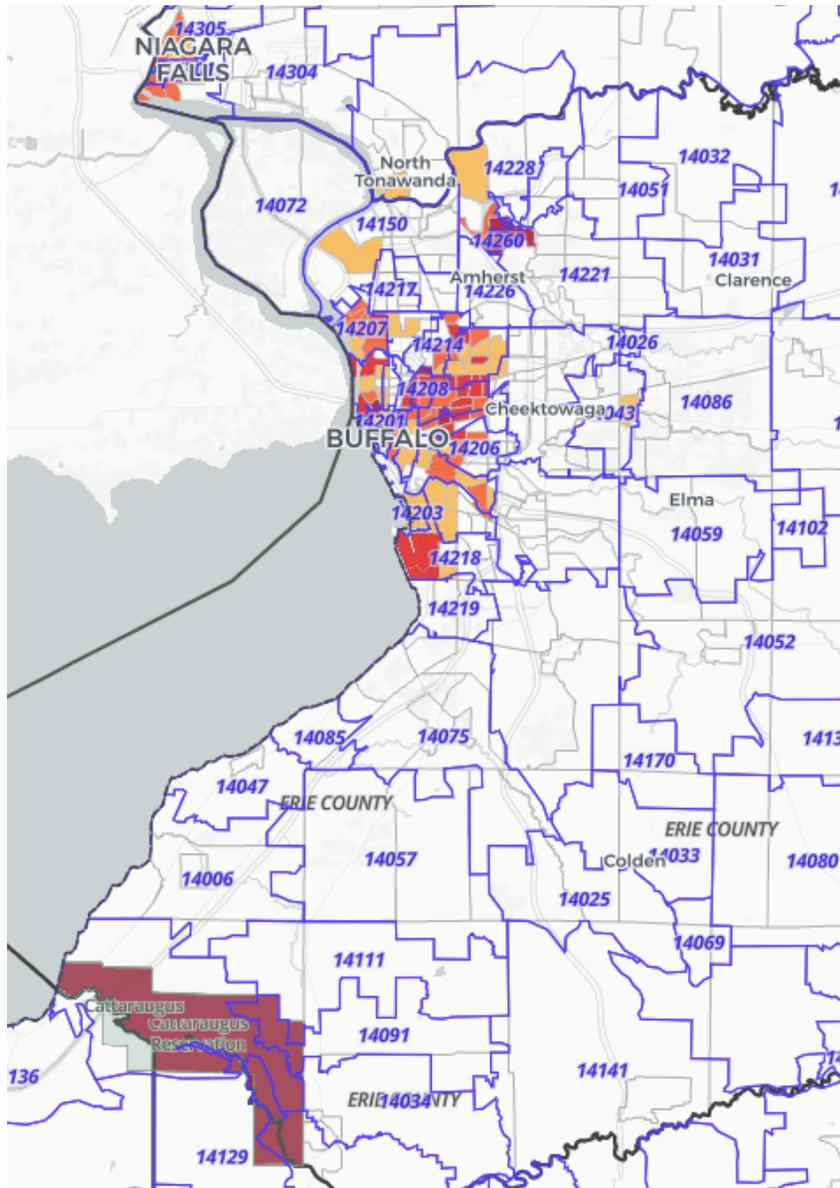
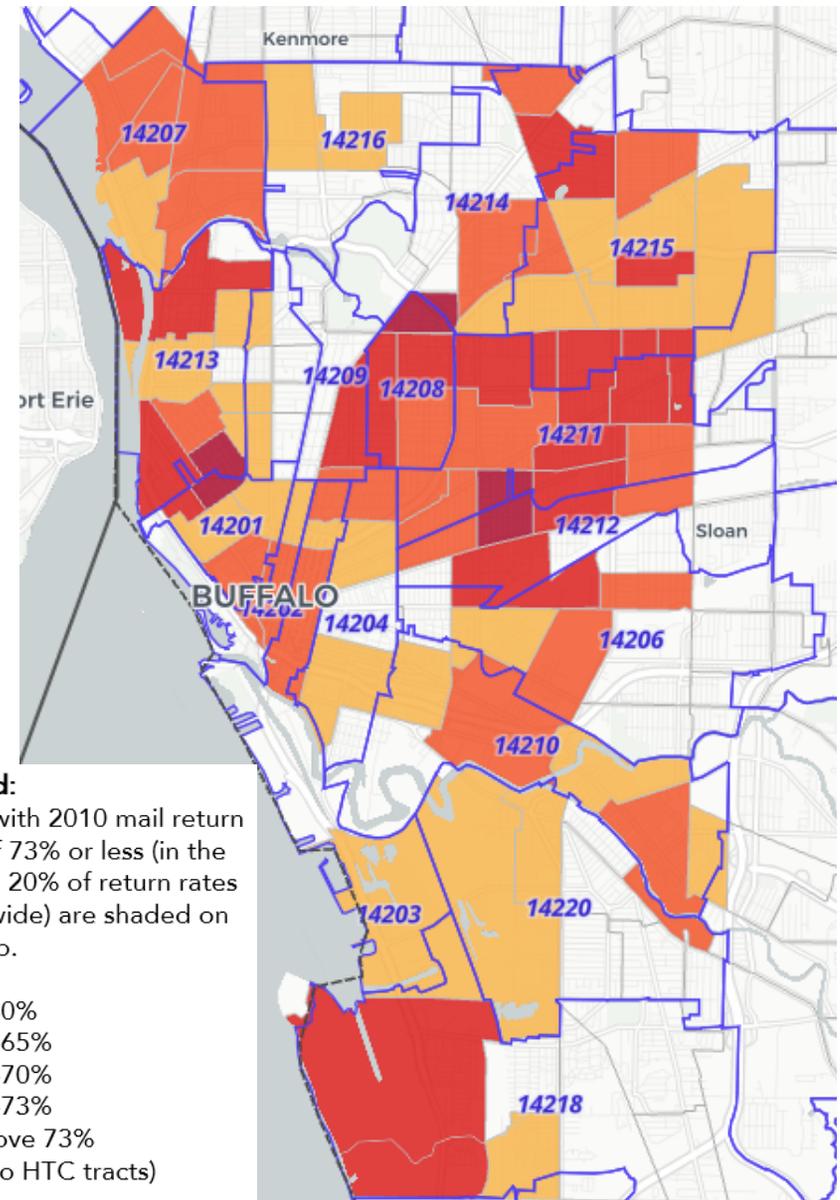


FIGURE 1. HARD TO COUNT TRACTS IN ERIE COUNTY AND NIAGARA FALLS
 Source: CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, Hard to Count Maps 2020. Scale generated using "HTC 2020," March 8, 2019.



Legend:
 Tracts with 2010 mail return rates of 73% or less (in the bottom 20% of return rates nationwide) are shaded on the map.

- 0-60%
- 60-65%
- 65-70%
- 70-73%
- above 73%
(no HTC tracts)

FIGURE 2. HARD TO COUNT TRACTS IN BUFFALO AND LACKAWANNA
 Source: CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, Hard to Count Maps 2020. Scale generated using "HTC 2020," March 8, 2019.

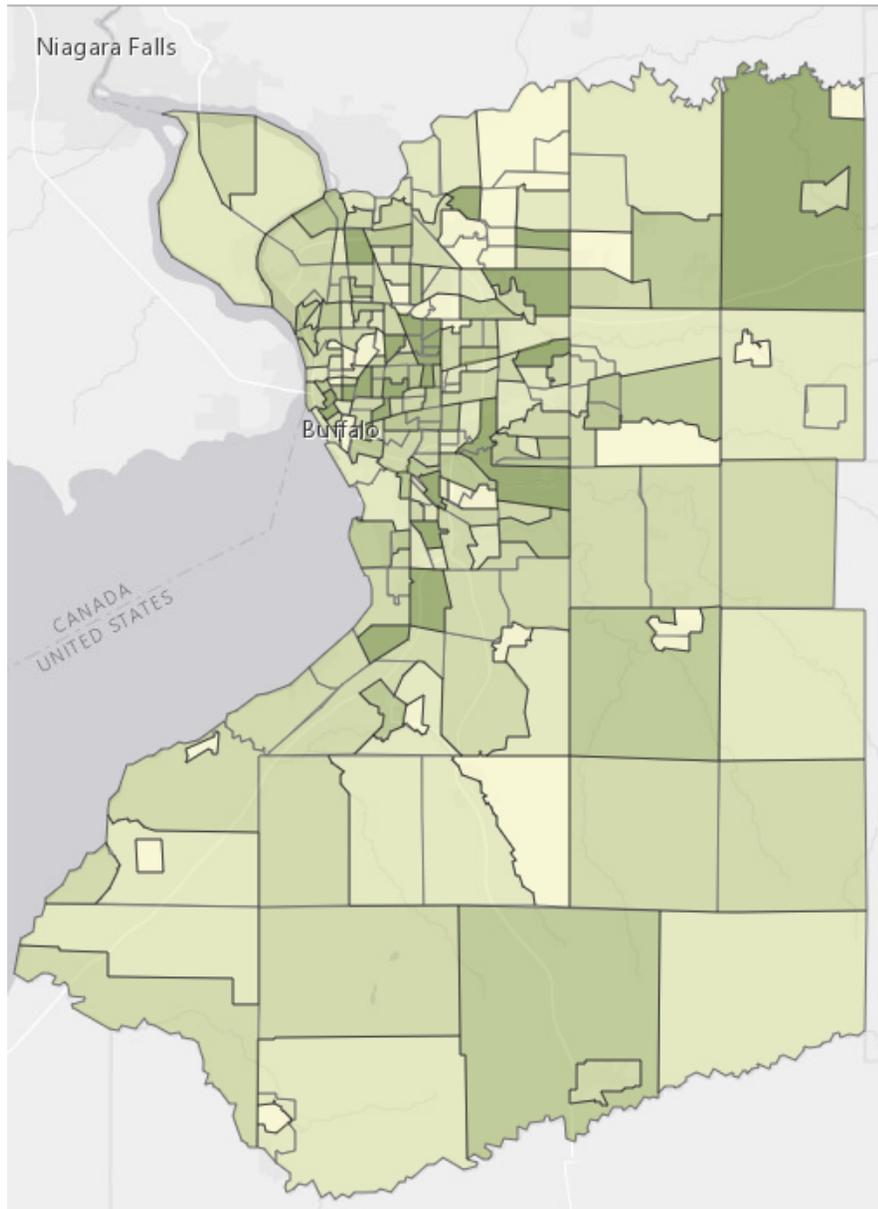
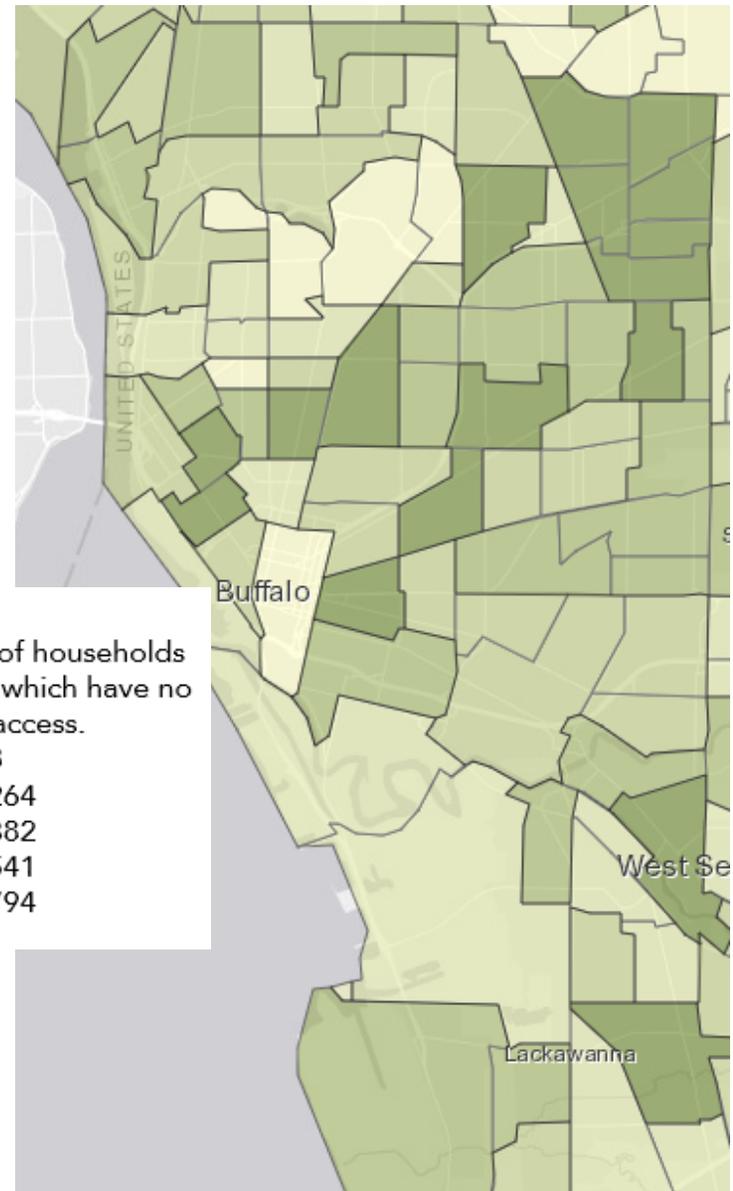


FIGURE 3. NO INTERNET ACCESS – ERIE COUNTY
 US Census Bureau, Internet Subscriptions in Household, Erie County 2013-2017 (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Scale generated using American Fact Finder, March 8, 2019.

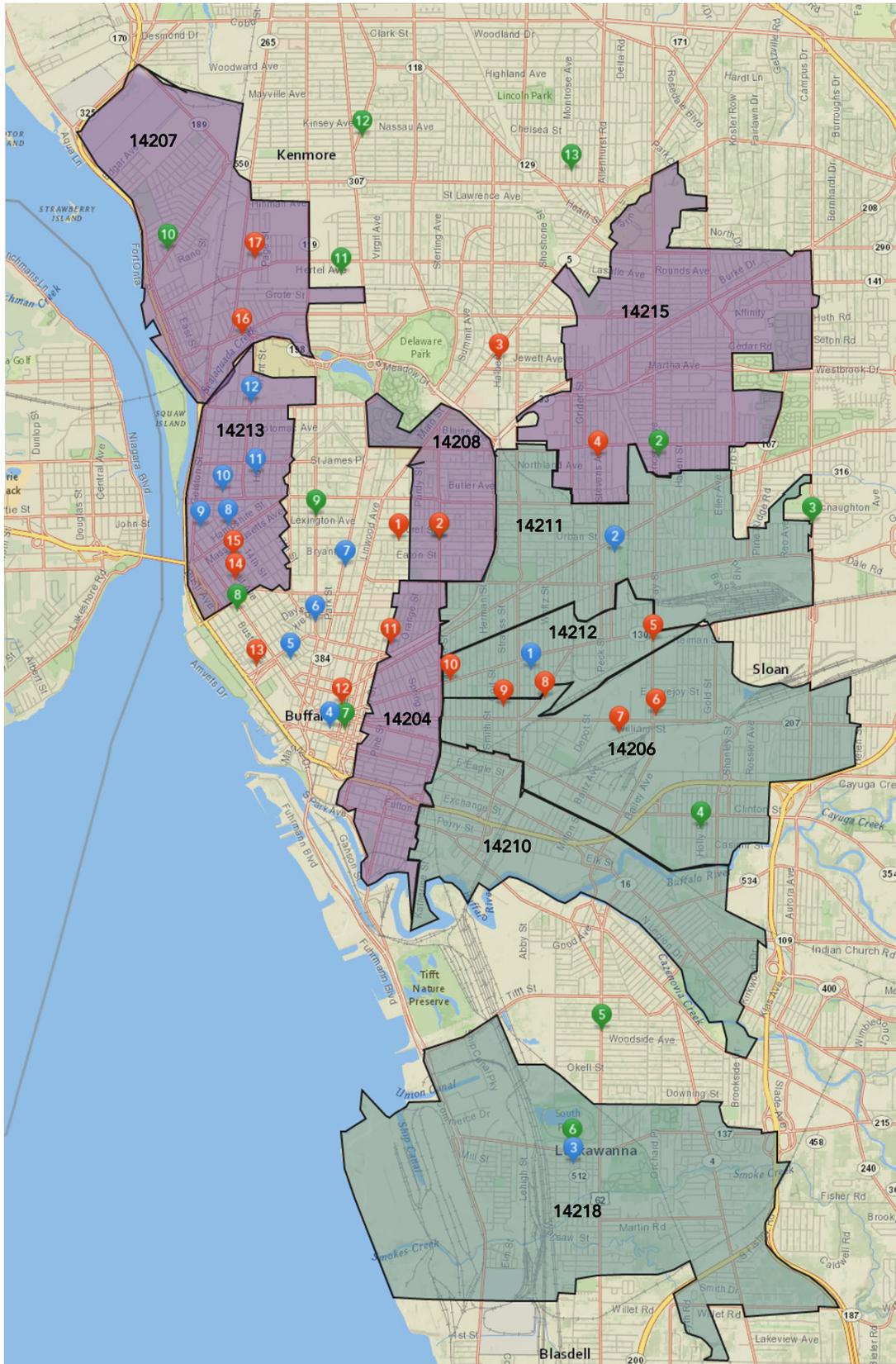


Legend:
 Number of households per tract which have no internet access.

- 0-148
- 154-264
- 266-382
- 387-541
- 551-794

FIGURE 4. NO INTERNET ACCESS – BUFFALO AND LACKAWANNA
 US Census Bureau, Internet Subscriptions in Household, Erie County 2013-2017 (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Scale generated using American Fact Finder, March 8, 2019.

Community Assets in Buffalo's “Hard-to-Count” Neighborhoods¹⁸



Libraries

1. Frank E. Merriweather, Jr. Library

1324 Jefferson Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14208
716.883-4418
Accessible by bus routes: 12, 13, 18

2. Leroy R. Coles, Jr. Branch

1187 E. Delavan Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14215
716.896-4433
Accessible by bus routes: 12, 19, 26

3. Anna Reinstein Memorial Library

2580 Harlem Road
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
716.892-8089
Accessible by bus routes: 24, 26

4. East Clinton Branch

1929 Clinton Street
Buffalo, NY 14206
716.823-5626
Accessible by bus route: 2

5. Dudley Branch

2010 South Park Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14220
716-823-1854
Accessible by bus routes: 14, 16

6. Lackawanna Public Library

560 Ridge Road
Lackawanna, NY 14218
Accessible by bus routes: 16, 42

7. Central (downtown Buffalo)

1 Lafayette Square
Buffalo, NY 14203
716-858-8900
Accessible by routes: 1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 16, 19, 20, 24, 25, 42, metro rail

8. Isaías González-Soto Branch Library

280 Porter Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14201
716.882-1537
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5, 22, 40

9. Crane Branch

633 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222
716.883-6651
Accessible by bus routes: 7, 12, 20, 25

10. Riverside Branch

820 Tonawanda Street
Buffalo, NY 14207
716.875-0562
Accessible by bus routes: 5, 23, 35

11. North Park Branch

975 Hertel Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14216
716-875.3748
Accessible by bus routes: 20, 23, 25

12. Kenmore Branch

160 Delaware Road
Kenmore, NY 14217
716-873-2842
Accessible by bus routes: 5, 20, 25

13. Kenilworth Branch

318 Montrose Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14223
716-834-7657
Accessible by bus routes: 5, 6, 13, 34, metro rail

Immigrant and Ethnic Organizations

1. Jericho Road Community Health Center – Broadway

1021 Broadway
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 4, 6, 19, 23

2. Jericho Road Community Health Center – Genesee

1609 Genesee Street
Buffalo, NY 14211
Accessible by bus routes: 6, 12, 19, 22, 24

3. ACCESS of WNY

609 Ridge Road, 2nd Floor
Lackawanna, NY 14218
Accessible by bus routes: 16, 42

4. Journey’s End Refugee Services

2495 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14214
Accessible by bus routes: 5, 8, 19, 23, metro rail

5. Hispanos Unidos De Buffalo

254 Virginia Street
Buffalo, NY 14201
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5, 29

6. Latin American Cultural Association

114 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14201
Accessible by bus routes: 7, 11, 19, 20, 25, 29

7. Iraqi American Society *and* International Institute of Buffalo

864 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14209
Accessible by bus routes: 8, 12, 20, 22, 25, metro rail

8. Catholic Charities – Immigration and Refugee Assistance

20 Herkimer Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5, 12

9. Burmese Community Services

81 Albany Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5, 12

10. Jericho Road Community Health Center – Barton

184 Barton Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5, 12, 26

11. Burmese Community Support Center

286 Lafayette Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 26

12. WASH Project

593 Grant Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 20

Community Centers and Neighborhood Groups

1. Masten Block Club Coalition

118 E. Utica Street
Buffalo, NY 14205
Accessible by bus routes: 9, 12, 13, 18, metro rail

2. Open Buffalo

1327 Jefferson Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14208
Accessible by bus routes: 12, 13, 18

3. FLARE (Filmore-Leroy Area Residents)

2495 Main Street, Suite 412
Buffalo, NY 14214
Accessible by bus routes: 8, 23, 32, metro rail

4. Delavan-Grider Community Center

877 E. Delavan Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14215
Accessible by bus routes: 13, 26

5. Catholic Charities – Bailey/Broadway

1581 Bailey Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14212
Accessible by bus routes: 4, 19

6. Catholic Charities – Abley Center

24 Ludington Street
Buffalo, NY 14206
Accessible by bus routes: 1, 19

7. Back to Basics Ministries

1370 William Street
Buffalo, NY 14206
Accessible by bus routes: 1, 19

8. Matt Urban H.O.P.E. Center

385 Paderwski Drive
Buffalo, NY 14212
Accessible by bus routes: 4, 23

9. Greater Eastside Field of Dreams

188 Detroit Street
Buffalo, NY 14212
Accessible by bus routes: 1, 4, 23

10. Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers

423 Monroe Street
Buffalo, NY 14212
Accessible by bus routes: 4, 6, 18, 24

11. Fruit Belt Coalition

150 Maple Street
Buffalo, NY 14204
Accessible by bus routes: 8, 18, 22, metro rail

12. Buffalo Urban League

15 Genesee Street
Buffalo, NY 14203
Accessible by bus routes: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 20, 25, metro rail

13. The Belle Center

104 Maryland Street
Buffalo, NY 14201
Accessible by bus routes: 5, 29

14. West Side Community Services

161 Vermont Street
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5

15. PUSH Buffalo

429 Plymouth Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14213
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 5,

16. Y.W.C.A. of WNY

1005 Grant Street
Buffalo, NY 14207
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 32

17. Community Health Center

155 Lawn Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14207
Accessible by bus routes: 3, 20, 23

Achieving a Fair, Accurate, Complete Count in 2020

To achieve a fair and complete count in 2020, the federal government is relying on outreach and action by state and local governments, philanthropic organizations, and community-based organizations. Federal dollars, while providing for tools that can be implemented locally and funding actual census taking, cannot be distributed directly to community-based organizations. These organizations will be relied upon to do much of the heavy lifting of census outreach.¹⁷ New York State's 2019 budget allocated up to \$20 million to community-based organizations for census outreach, less than half of the amount recommended by advocates and experts, including the Fiscal Policy Institute.¹⁸ By comparison, California has allocated over \$100 million in state dollars for census outreach.¹⁹

Public libraries will play a critical role in complete count efforts. Twenty-five percent of New York State households earning less than \$50,000 a year identify a local library as their primary point of Internet access. In fact, almost ninety-nine percent of New York State's hard-to-count tracts are within five miles of a library.²⁰ To address this, the New York Library Association is actively seeking adequate funding to accommodate the influx of individuals seeking support to fill out the census.²¹ Locally, directors of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System and the Niagara Falls Public Library have added their support for these complete count efforts.²²

Community group partners have also been identified by the Census Bureau as a critical resource to aid in the collection of data for the 2020 Census, especially among hard-to-count communities. Trusted members of the community can help build confidence among hard-to-count groups and serve as a resource. In a poll on census attitudes, forty-six percent of individuals indicated they would be more likely to respond to the census if its importance was highlighted by a local nonprofit or community group.²³

Those interested in serving in the community to help with the 2020 Census should visit www.census2020.gov/jobs and reach out to local community organizations. It is important to note that while many of these jobs are temporary, they are high-paying and fill a vital role in census taking efforts.

99% of New York State's Hard-to-Count Tracts are **within 5 miles** of a library.

46% of individuals indicated they would be **more likely to respond** to the census if its importance was **highlighted by a community group**.

Local Efforts to Date

In Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown's 2019 State of the City address, he announced his intention to form a City of Buffalo Complete Count Committee. In late March 2019, Mayor Brown launched the "Buffalo Count Us In 2020 Steering Committee."²⁴

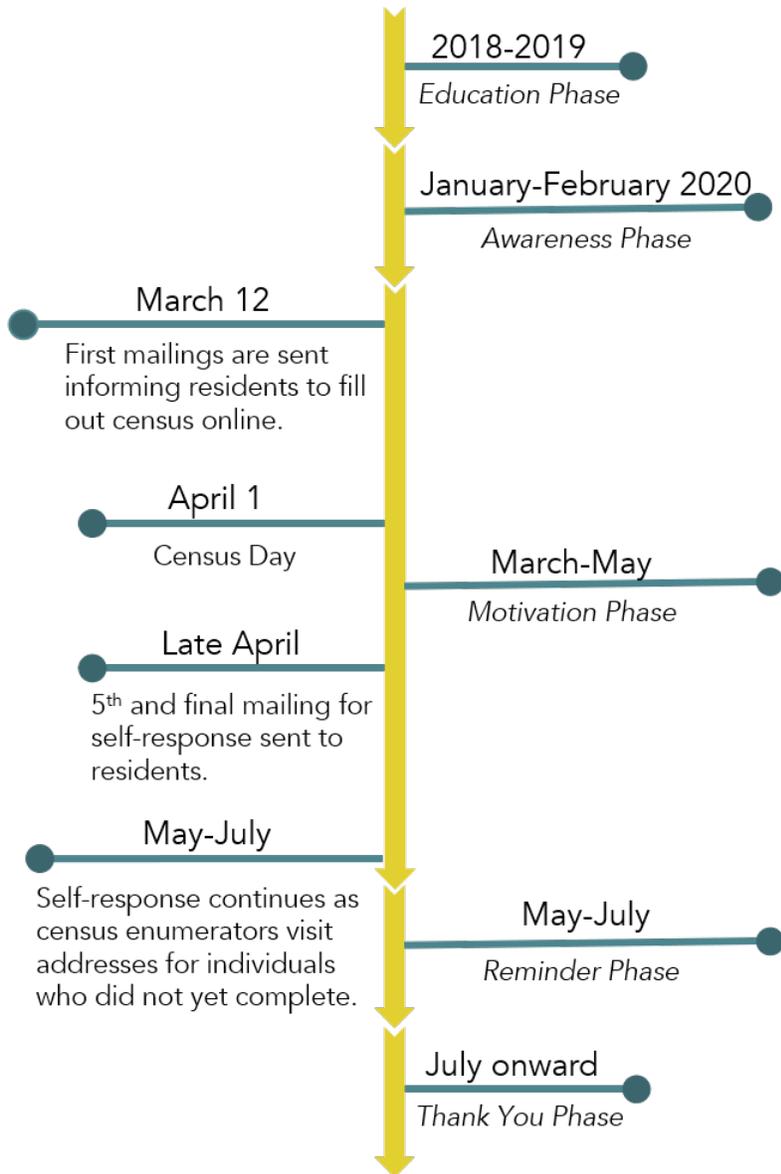
Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz echoed this in his State of the County address and formed a Complete Count Committee in April 2019. The committee will include community leaders, business leaders, religious and faith leaders, nonprofits, librarians, and any stakeholder that supports the Committee's mission.

At the same time, the New York State Complete Count Commission was formed and has held public hearings and events throughout New York State to gain public input. The Commission visited Buffalo on April 18, 2019 where they heard two testimonies and listened to public comments from eleven speakers. One of the Commission's goals is analyzing undercounts in the past to ensure a complete and accurate count for the upcoming census. They will generate a report based on their findings.²⁵

Timeline

With census taking due to begin in March 2020, the months ahead are a critical time for preparation and outreach.

The following timeline lists the phases and key dates for census operations through July 2020:



With census taking set to begin in March 2020, the months ahead are a **critical time** for preparation and outreach.

Recommendations

- **Involve** as many community organizations as possible. The U.S. Census Bureau is depending on community organizations to spread the word and serve as trusted voices in the communities they serve. The more organizations that are involved and equipped with tools to discuss the census with the communities they serve, the more successful the census will be.
- **Educate** on the importance of a complete and accurate count. Residents and organizations alike need to be aware of the impact an inaccurate count could have on funding and legislative representation.
- Ensure community organizations can access state-allocated money for census outreach by making it **easy to apply** for grants and funding.
- New York State should consider the allocation of **additional state funding** for libraries and community groups to provide the services necessary to ensure a complete and accurate count.
- **Coordinate** efforts throughout the city, county, and state to share tools and resources and ensure work is not overlapping unnecessarily.
- **Create** a localized timeline and plan for the education phase (the remaining months of 2019), crafted with the input and agreement of all complete count committees and involved organizations.
- **Encourage** community members to sign up for enumerator jobs.
- **Provide** additional service hours and technology to libraries to provide specific resources for Census 2020.

Having a fair, accurate count impacts everyone in Western New York. Inclusive, broad, and coordinated efforts now and in the months ahead are critical to make Census 2020 count.

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