Tribes and the Census

Census Counts Mean Money for Indian Country

There are two major arguments for why Native people, as well as others, should be counted in the 2020 decennial census.

The first is that the counts contribute to political power. Census numbers are used to determine the number of seats each state gets in the US House of Representatives. In addition, the Census counts are used in redrawing the lines for all Congressional Districts in states with more than one District. The counts are also used in drawing the district lines for seats in the state legislatures and for many substate governments as well.

The second argument is that Census counts mean money. The Census Bureau has reported that in federal Fiscal Year 2015, Census data were used to determine the distribution of close to $690 billion dollars for 132 federal programs.

This newsletter takes a closer look at the way in which this money benefits Native people and communities. It's not as simple as the frequently used one-liner that every person counted means $3,000 for that community.

These are the top dozen federal programs in the Census Bureau's list in order of the dollar amounts funded by the program in Fiscal Year 2015:

- Medicaid
- SNAP (Food Stamps)
- Medicare Part B Physicians Services
- Highway Planning and Construction
- Federal Pell Grant Program
- National School Lunch Program
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher
- Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies
- Special Education Grants to States
- Head Start
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Together this list of a dozen programs accounts for $613.7 billion, or nearly 90% of the total amount of close to $690 billion for all 132 programs on the list.
The list includes federal programs that use Census Bureau data in any one of three ways: to select recipients of funds, to allocate program funds (to state agencies in many cases), and/or to monitor program performance. The data used comes from a number of Census Bureau surveys, such as the American Community Survey (ACS), in addition to the decennial census.

A few of the programs on the list provide direct funding to tribal governments and tribal organizations. **However, the big benefit to Indian Country is the services these programs offer to Native people, in most cases in both reservation and off-reservation communities.**

**Medicaid and Food Stamps**

Medicaid is by far the largest program on the list. It is essential in reimbursing medical care for many needy Indian patients. The federal agency that administers the program estimated that in Fiscal Year 2013 roughly 900,000 American Indian and Alaska Native people were eligible for the program.

Also very important is the benefit that Medicaid reimbursement for services to Native patients provides to the Indian Health Service. Those reimbursements are a major portion of the funding for direct IHS services and for health services provided by tribes.

The Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, otherwise known as Food Stamps) is another interesting case. Like Medicaid, it is means-tested; one has to be low income to qualify for assistance.

According to US Department of Agriculture computations, in Fiscal Year 2016 there were 244,000 Native American (non-Hispanic) households nationwide that received food stamp benefits.

A closer look at the data for several states and one Congressional District in Arizona that includes a number of large reservation areas shows how heavily dependent the Native American population is on food stamp assistance. In South Dakota an estimated 46.9% of all American Indian/Alaska Native households in the state received SNAP benefits that Fiscal Year. In the 1st Congressional District of Arizona the percentage was 35.7%. In Alaska, statewide, it was 31.7%. In North Dakota it was 29.6%. In Montana it was 26.3%.

Most of the other programs on the Census Bureau's list are also means-tested. The benefits go to low income persons, families or households.
As the table below shows, AI/AN persons have the highest poverty rate of any racial group in the country. This indicates that Native people are more likely to be eligible for the programs than persons of any other race.

### Poverty Rates by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race (Single Race)</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (of any race)</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Estimates for 2017

It is important to note that the data in the table is for the nation as a whole, reservation and off-reservation.

### Indian Programs Using Census Data

The Census Bureau list of 132 federal programs that use Bureau data in some way includes several programs that are Indian-specific and fund tribal governments and tribal organizations directly.

The **Indian Housing Block Grant program**, funded by HUD, is one of the largest. It allocates funds annually among American Indian and Alaska Native housing authorities on the basis of a formula with multiple factors. Several of these factors involve need. The population data in the formula come from the decennial census, updated annually based on IHS birth and death data. Data on the condition of housing stock within the tribe's IHBG area are drawn from the Bureau's American Community Survey. Another major factor in the formula, current assisted housing stock, is derived from the individual grantee's own records, not Census data.

The **Tribal Transportation Programs**, funded through the Federal Highway Administration in the Department of Transportation and administered by BIA, uses the basic Native population data calculated for the HUD IHBG program along with data on factors not covered by Census programs.

Other federal Indian programs using Census data in some form include the **Comprehensive Services Program and Supplemental Youth Services programs** under...
Section 166 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and several Indian child welfare programs administered by HHS.

In all these cases, Native individuals and families benefit directly, as well as each tribal government or organization that operates the programs.

Is Data Used to Administer Programs a Motivator to Answer the Census?

Will the fact that Census data is used to administer federal programs that are very important to Native people help to motivate every Native person to answer the 2020 Census questionnaire?

That question has recently been tested in a Census survey called CBAMS. That stands for the Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Survey. (Every Census Bureau operation has to have an acronym.)

This survey was recently conducted in a number of areas across the country and with a number of test groups, including ones involving Native people. The purpose was to try to determine the extent to which people respond to various messages about why they should participate in the 2020 national headcount.

The results are now being tallied and are expected to become available around the end of this year. A presentation on the results of the CBAMS survey will be on the agenda for the next quarterly review of the Bureau's progress in implementing the 2020 Census. The review is scheduled for January of 2019.

The CBAMS results will help to shape the messages used for various audiences in the Bureau's extensive 2020 outreach and promotion campaign.

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