



City of San Antonio

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Title: Briefing on the San Antonio/Bexar County Complete Count Committee and local efforts to ensure a complete count for the 2020 Census in response to COVID-19. [Carlos Contreras, Assistant City Manager; Jeff Coyle, Director, Government & Public Affairs]

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Indexes:

Code sections:

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| Date | Ver. | Action By | Action | Result |
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DEPARTMENT: Government & Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT: Briefing on the 2020 Census and Complete Count Committee activities in response to COVID-19.

SUMMARY:

Government and Public Affairs will provide an update on the San Antonio/Bexar County Complete Count Committee and local efforts underway for the 2020 Census in response to the COVID-19 emergency and the related delays by the federal government.

BACKGROUND:

In the summer of 2018 the City of San Antonio convened stakeholders representing multiple community organizations to develop the framework of a strategic work plan which would guide San Antonio's efforts for a complete count during the 2020 Census. A critical strategy central to achieving a complete count was to form a Complete Count Committee (Committee) which the City and County launched in April 2019.

The Committee, under the leadership of Co-Chairs Celina Pena and Rebecca Cedillo, formed 6 Subcommittees and identified 12 Target Populations at risk of being undercounted in the 2020 Census. During the summer of 2019, the Subcommittees identified strategies to mitigate barriers to participation among the Target Populations and developed the 2020 Census Strategic plan. The Strategic Plan focused on high-touch grass roots outreach efforts that included the involvement of nearly 60 community based organizations. The plan also included paid media/marketing strategies that would support the high-touch outreach efforts by creating top of mind awareness, multiple touch point opportunities and a call to action to participate in the census.

In October of 2019, GPA provided a briefing to City Council on how the City would invest nearly \$400,000 to

support the Committee's advertising/marketing and high-touch grass roots outreach efforts.

In early 2020 the Committee continued to lay out the strategic frame work for getting a complete count by solidifying community partner relationships, producing Mayor/Council PSAs, creating earned media opportunities to promote the census and preparing for the April 1 launch of the 2020 Census. In March of 2020, COVID-19 drastically altered national timelines and the City's work on how we would achieve a complete count.

The U.S. Census Bureau extended the 2020 Census end date from July 31 to October 31. The pandemic resulted in the loss of key community based activation opportunities and the Committee's focus shifted from high-touch grass roots outreach to high-media communications. Due to this shift in focus GPA made the decision to forgo retaining the services of an advertising agency, as had been proposed during the October 2019 briefing, and instead manage all media planning/buying in-house. Internal management of the paid media strategies has allowed staff the flexibility to optimize media strategies as needed based on near real time response-rates and the ever changing environment of the pandemic.

A key campaign strategy has been to augment the U.S. Census Bureau's paid broadcast media by identifying non-traditional, high-impact, mediums that allow us to reach individuals where they are. Since in person one-on-one communication with residents was no longer an option, digital mediums have become essential to keeping a consistent and relevant message among our target populations. Other effective mediums currently being used to promote a census message include over-the-street banners, gas pump ads, delivery of door hangers, cash register receipt ads and print advertizing. The City will also be implementing a Mobile Marketing Texting campaign and placing billboard ads in the coming months to align with the Bureau's extension of the data collection.

In light of the State of Texas' decision to not allocate dollars for census outreach, the City, in collaboration with the Committee and The Bexar County Health Collaborative (THC) pursued and acquired funding from the San Antonio Area Foundation, Hogg Foundation and the Texas Pooled Fund. A total of \$320,000 in grant funding has been awarded to support the outreach efforts of the Committee. The initial funding parameters were focused on high-touch grass roots outreach efforts; however, outreach has now shifted to high-impact outreach in response to COVID-19. The City has been working very closely with THC to identify stakeholders who continue to engage in community and who have the ability to communicate the census in their daily work. To date 16 stakeholders have been awarded a total of \$213,400 for census outreach.

With the extension of the Census, the U.S. Census Bureau will not begin door-to-door data collection until mid-August; given this, the community has a two-and-a-half month window remaining to encourage residents in hard-to-count census tracts to self-respond. Although we continue to perform well with a self-response rate of 59.4% for Bexar County and 57.8% for San Antonio, there has been a recent a drop in daily response rates. Early analysis indicates lower responses among households with racial/ethnic minorities, individuals with lower income and individuals in the digital divide. The decrease is likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, the response efforts of government agencies, and Census Bureau delays.

To increase daily response rates, GPA will shift its focus to identification and implementation of paid media strategies to support the Complete Count Committee and adjust to the situation created by COVID-19. Examples of strategies include - extending our paid social media campaign and gas pump ads, adding mobile marketing texting, print media and billboard ads to the existing media mix.

With the elimination of in-person activation activities, paid Social Media is a flexible and effective medium that allows us to optimize our reach to target populations in hard to count census tracts. The use of geo-targeting and

culturally relevant social media posts allows for equitable outreach in census tracts with low self-responses. In light of COVID-19 social media has increased in usage, with a 37% increase in Facebook alone.

GPA will also be implementing a Mobile Marketing Texting strategy which will allow for both geo-fencing and geo-targeting in hard to count census tracts at location sites such as K-12 campuses and Public Housing properties. Non-digital media strategies will include placement of junior billboard ads in neighborhoods located in low response rate census tracts, and newspaper ads in the Express News, SA Observer, La Prensa and Southside Reporter.

The City will also be working closely with the U.S. Census Bureau Area Operations Office and Partnership Specialists to support their efforts as they move into the next phase of data collection in community.

ISSUE:

The 2020 Census is the constitutionally mandated decennial count of the U.S. population. Data gathered is used to apportion representation at the federal and state government and impacts the distribution of billions of dollars in funds to states and local communities. As one of the fastest growing regions in the state, an accurate and complete count of our residents is critical to the City of San Antonio. Redistricting at the local, state and federal levels will occur after the 2020 Census has been completed. The COVID-19 crisis has required shifts in Complete Count Committee strategies to help maximize local response rates.

ALTERNATIVES:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing purposes only.