

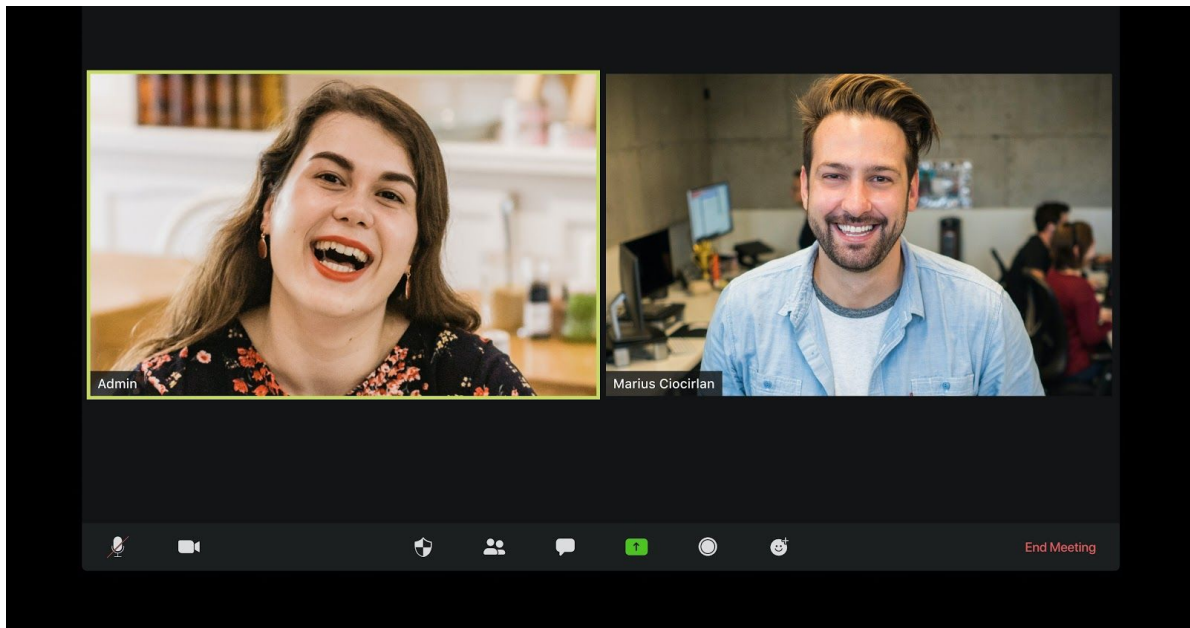
Run your own Virtual Census Create-a-thon!

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# VIRTUAL CREATE-A-THON TOOLKIT

A resource from the [Census Open Innovation Labs at the U.S. Census Bureau](#)

**CREATIVES**  
FOR THE **COUNT**



## Host Your Own Census Virtual Create-a-Thon

Whether you're a creative professional, a hard-to-count community advocate, a student activist, or just fired up about the Census, the following plan and resource library will get you on your way to hosting a Virtual Create-a-thon in your own community.

**Questions? We're here to help!**

Email us at [census.accelerate@census.gov](mailto:census.accelerate@census.gov)  
or visit [accelerate.census.gov](https://accelerate.census.gov) to learn more.

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# INTRODUCTION

## □ About Create-a-thons

### WHAT IS A CENSUS CREATE-A-THON?

Many organizations leading 2020 Census outreach efforts have limited creative and/or digital capacity. Yet, as trusted voices, it is vital that their outreach efforts be amplified online to reach as many of their community members as possible. **Census Create-a-thons** bring together creative talent (designers, copywriters, content strategists, video-makers, etc.) with those organizations so that they can conduct more effective digital outreach, with the ultimate goal of increasing self-response rates among the hardest-to-count communities they serve.

### WHY VIRTUAL?

The [Census Open Innovation Labs](#) piloted this model over the course of 2018 - 2020, with events ranging from 2 - 5 informative and festive hours. Participants would dive into targeted briefs from local advocacy organizations, connect with a diverse group of talented people, and collaboratively generate digital media and compelling messages that spread awareness about the 2020 Census.

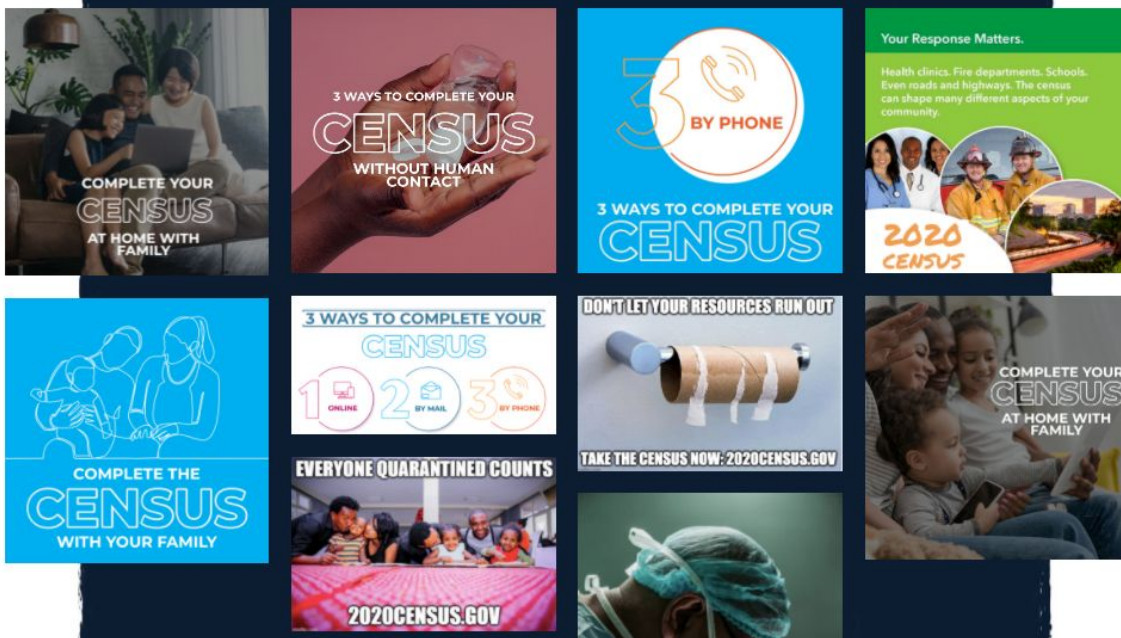
Now, given our current public health environment, we've taken our Create-a-thon format online. This guide will help you lead your event virtually.

## WHERE DOES ALL THE CONTENT LIVE?

Our partners at Rock the Vote and U.Group developed [creativesfortheaccount.org](https://creativesfortheaccount.org), an online repository where you can browse, filter by audience type, download, and add your own Census content. We recommend checking it out to get inspired for your Create-a-thon - and you might even find some content you want to use!

GALLERY

## Check Out What We've Made So Far



## **THE CENSUS HAPPENING NOW. SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?**

We know the importance of voting, civic engagement, the impacts it has on our nation. But what about the Decennial Census? The count of United States population sets our country's trajectory for the next decade, determining congressional apportionment (the number of seats each state gets in the House of Representatives), redistricting, and how the allocation of more than \$675 billion dollars is distributed annually to cities across the nation.

Underserved racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ people, people experiencing homelessness, rural communities, people with low incomes, renters, single-parent households, people with limited English proficiency, and young children are overwhelmingly undercounted in the census. But you can help change that.



## Want to host your own?

Awesome! Create-a-thons are being hosted by Census Bureau staff, advocacy groups, community organizers, students, and the public.

**Interested in hosting a Create-a-thon and need some support?** If you haven't already, [start by filling out this form to let our team know you're interested.](#) You can take this toolkit and run with it, or reach out to us for extra support.

Alright, let's get started!

## PHASE 1:

## SETTING OBJECTIVES & THE BASICS

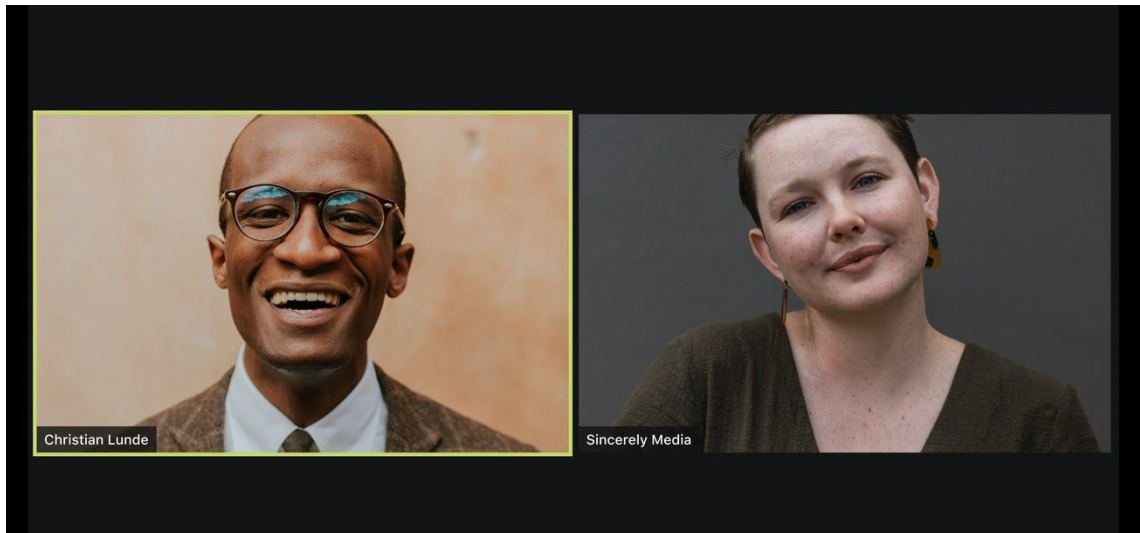
### Get inspired

Check out the bank of content generated from Create-a-thons hosted across the country. Get familiar with the types of content created — from animated GIFs to social banners to videos to comics — and all of the different messages that can motivate communities to get out the count.

→ Spend some time perusing <https://www.creativesfortheaccount.org/>



## Form your team



Create-a-thons are always stronger when we work in partnership with the organizations that will be actually using the content on the other side of the event. Depending on what hard-to-count community your Create-a-thon is designed to reach, we recommend working closely with trusted messengers and other outreach organizations to plan and promote the event.

**Here are some of the roles you'll want to consider having someone own.**

- Tech Producer - to handle all attendee and video chat logistics
- Facilitator - to guide the conversation the day of
- Lead from community group that represents local or national hard-to-count community - to provide insights around the kind of content needed, and most motivating messages
- Outreach and Marketing lead - to lead the charge on getting the word out, and making sure attendees have everything they need to be successful before, during and after the event
- Consider getting buy-in from:
  - A Local Complete Count Committee
  - U.S. Census Bureau Regional Partnership Specialist

- Organizations conducting Census outreach to hard-to-count community/ies (national, statewide, and local)
- Creative networks: Local AIGA Chapters, university design departments, Meetups, etc.
- National partners: Census Counts organizations or State Voices

## Define your audience

### Want to understand what we mean by hard-to-count?

The Census Bureau recognizes a range of socio-demographic, racial minorities, children under 5 and many others as [hard-to-count](#) (HTC) communities. A 2020 [Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study CBAMS Survey](#) was conducted in 2019 to help identify underlying challenges around filling out the 2020 Census. We encourage you to use the analysis distilled in these surveys to help determine your HTC community partners and specific creative content strategies.

After you've identified which hard-to-count community (or communities) your event will focus on, consider the following: Who can you partner closely with who deeply understands this hard-to-count group? Do you know generally where people within this community access their media? Which messages will be most motivating? What are some of the countless identities and diverse experiences that exist within this hard to count group?

We recommend spending time researching your hard to count community, collaborating with nonprofit partners that support that HTC community, as well as creating “personas,” a term we borrowed from a discipline called human-centered design. A persona is an archetypal person — either real or fictitious — that represents some of the key dynamics of your hard-to-count group, and helps ground ideation in lived human experiences.

If you or the interviewee do not identify as a member of the hard-to-count group for whom you've developed a persona, it is critical that someone from that group review it prior to your virtual event to ensure cultural appropriateness.

[Use this template](#) to create personas ahead of the event, or hand these out and invite individual groups to write them up, with people who can personally identify with the hard-to-count group in discussion.

## PARTNER DISCUSSION INTERVIEW GUIDE

If you're not sure, ask. Here are interview questions that we've used to guide conversations with organizations representing hard-to-count communities to get clear on what type of content our Create-a-thon will be generating.

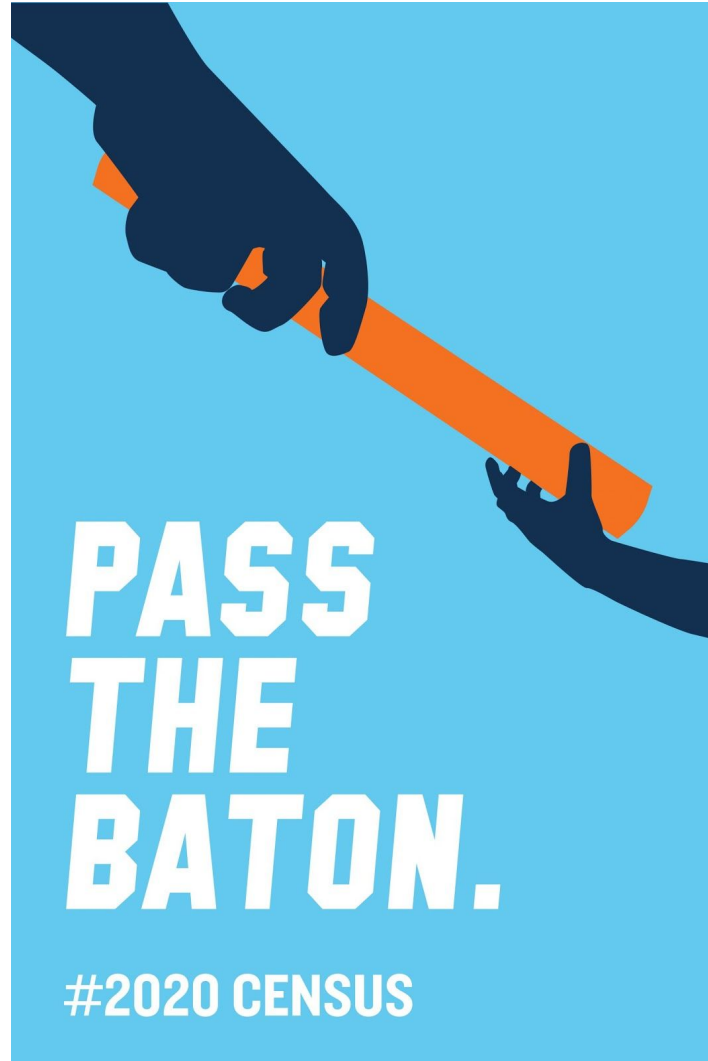
### **EVENT ORGANIZER TALKING TO ORGANIZATION WORKING WITH HARD TO COUNT COMMUNITIES**

“Thanks for taking the time to talk, and for all of the amazing work you do.

We're preparing for the upcoming virtual Create-a-thon, and wanted to dive in with you to make sure we get your input ahead of time.

In the Create-a-thon, we'll be workshoping and developing content, and want to ensure we develop materials that will be genuinely helpful for you.

1. What are your biggest needs around Census content for the coming months?
2. Can you tell me more about your audience? I.e. which channels you'll reach them through, and messaging that's particularly motivating?
3. What are the biggest barriers / challenges for you? What's keeping you up at night?
4. Anything else you haven't shared with us yet?
5. Bonus question - who else should be involved?“



## **Pick your event format**

There are three different ways we've seen virtual Create-a-thons work well. You know your attendees best, the kinds of technology available to you/them, and what sounds most energizing for your planning team — so we encourage you to trial out what works best for you!

## **FORMAT #1: SINGLE DAY**

Duration | 2 hours

Videoconference where participants are informed about Census & collaborate in creating content in real time, together

Pros | Collaboration, engagement, works best when individual break out groups are available for smaller group collaboration

Cons | Quality of content, can be intimidating for some, potential to get unwieldy

Suggested technology | Zoom with breakout rooms

### **Single Day Sample Agenda**

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0:00 - 0:05	Check-in
0:05 - :20	Welcome
:20 -:40	Briefing
:40- 1:40	Creating (in virtual break out groups if possible)
1:40 - 2:00	Report back + Conclusion

## **FORMAT #2: MULTI DAY**

Duration | 2 - 3 days

Day 1 – Info Session

Day 2 – Participants Create

Day 3 – Gather, Share, Deploy

Pros | Time and space to create, expanded offerings

Cons | Limited group interaction

Suggested technology | Any standard video chat will work, i.e. Skype, Google Meet, or Zoom and Slack for offline collaboration/feedback between participants and event organizers

## **Multi-Day Sample Agenda**

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### **Day 1 - Info Session**

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0:00 - 0:05    Check-in

0:05 - :20    Welcome

:20 -:40    Briefing

:40 - :60    Q&A

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### **Day 2 - Participants Create**

- No official gathering, but event organizers are available to answer questions via Slack or email
  - All attendees submit their creations by a set time, and event organizers compile all submissions into a presentation
- 

### **Day 3 - Gather, Share, Deploy**

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0:00 - 0:05    Check-in

0:05 - :15    Welcome Back & Present Content

:15 - :30    Discussion and Q&A

## **FORMAT #3: HYBRID MODEL**

Duration | 1 - 2 days

Collaborative videoconference of Single Day VCAT, activity is over the course a day or 2

Pros | Engagement of a Single Day but the flexibility of a Multi-Day

Cons | Organizational challenges, availability of time and resources

Suggested technology | Zoom with breakout room capability is ideal and Slack for offline collaboration/feedback between participants and event organizers

## Hybrid Model Sample Agenda

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### Day 1 - Info Session

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0:00 - 0:05	Check-in
0:05 - :20	Welcome
:20 -:40	Briefing
:40- 1:40	Creating (in virtual break out groups if possible)
1:40 - 2:00	Sharing back

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### Day 2 - Participants Create

- Start the day creating with event organizers available to answer questions via Slack or email
  - All attendees submit their creations by a set time, and event organizers compile all submissions into a presentation by mid day.
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### Day 2 Continued - Gather, Share, Deploy

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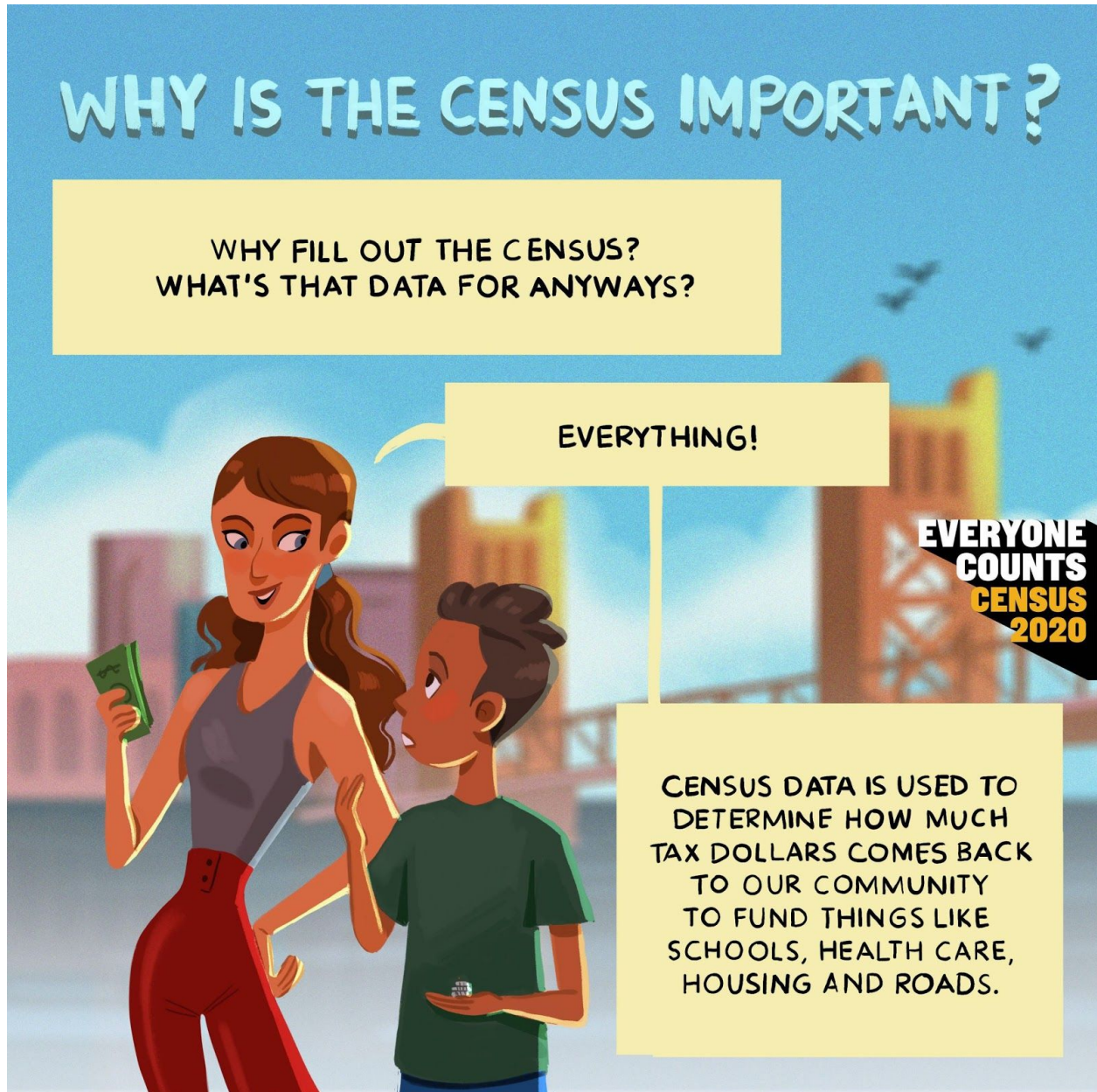
0:00 - 0:05	Check-in
0:05 - :15	Welcome Back & Present Content
:15 - :30	Discussion and Q&A

## Set your date & time

Once you've locked in which format you want to try out, it's time to pick the dates and times. Keep your invitees in mind, and think about what would work best for them. Do you think your attendees could log-in during the work day, or would it need to happen in the evening? Are there different time zones to take into consideration? Would a weekend day be preferable?



We generally advise giving yourself at least 10 days to get on people’s calendars – so keep that in mind as you’re choosing when to host your virtual Create-a-thon.





# **Pick your platform for invitation management & hosting**

## **Select your invitation tool (i.e. Splashthat, Eventbrite)**

In order to inspire attendees, easily spread the word, explain all event information, and easily track RSVPs, we highly recommend using a simple event page.

We're big fans of [Splashthat](#) for events, but it's not the only way to get the word out. You can also check out [Eventbrite](#), or even just send an email with an attached graphic - but remember, you'll have to keep track of RSVPs manually.

### **Here are a few of the past Create-a-thon sites on Splashthat for inspiration.**

- [Our first ever Virtual Create-a-thon](#) (virtual)
- [A virtual Create-a-thon hosted by Rock The Vote for Los Angeles](#) (virtual)
- [#CreativesForTheCount in El Paso, Texas](#)
- [#CreativesForTheCount Census Pride](#)

### **A few other pointers on setting up your page**

- If you end up going with Slashtat, we recommend using the theme called Sprout. [Check out this page with instructions on how to create and edit an event page on Splashthat.](#)
- We recommend using images from local artists or murals as decoration on the page, always citing the source. We usually find these by Google Image.

### **Here are some things we recommend including on your event page:**

- Things to include on your event page:
  - Time and date
  - Calendar invite / meeting request
  - Why the event is happening
- Questions to include on your registration form
  - First Name

- Last Name
- Email
- Title
- Organization
- I want to participate as a ... (check all that apply)
  - Strategist
  - Designer
  - Census Expert
  - Copywriter
  - Creative- other
  - Community advocate
  - Student
  - Community-based organization
- Here's some boiler plate language you can use as you make your site and conduct your outreach

### **CAN WE COUNT YOU IN?**

[PARTNER 1] and [PARTNER 2] will be joining forces with The Census Open Innovation Labs for a virtual creative workshop to reach hard-to-count communities!

Over the course of [DURATION] informative and festive hours, we'll dive into targeted briefs from local advocacy organizations, connect with a diverse group of talented people, and collaboratively generate digital media and compelling messages that spread awareness about the 2020

Census to communicate the importance of a complete and accurate count  
[X HARD TO COUNT COMMUNITIES.]

## **THE NEXT CENSUS COUNT IS COMING IN 2020. SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?**

We know the importance of voting and the impacts it has on our nation every election day. But what about the Decennial Census? The count of United States population sets our country's trajectory for the next decade, determining congressional apportionment (the number of seats each state gets in the House of Representatives), redistricting, and how the allocation of close to \$700 billion dollars is annually distributed annually to cities across the nation.

People of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, people experiencing homelessness, rural communities, people with low incomes, renters, single-parent households, people with limited English proficiency, and young children are overwhelmingly undercounted in the Census. But we can help change that.

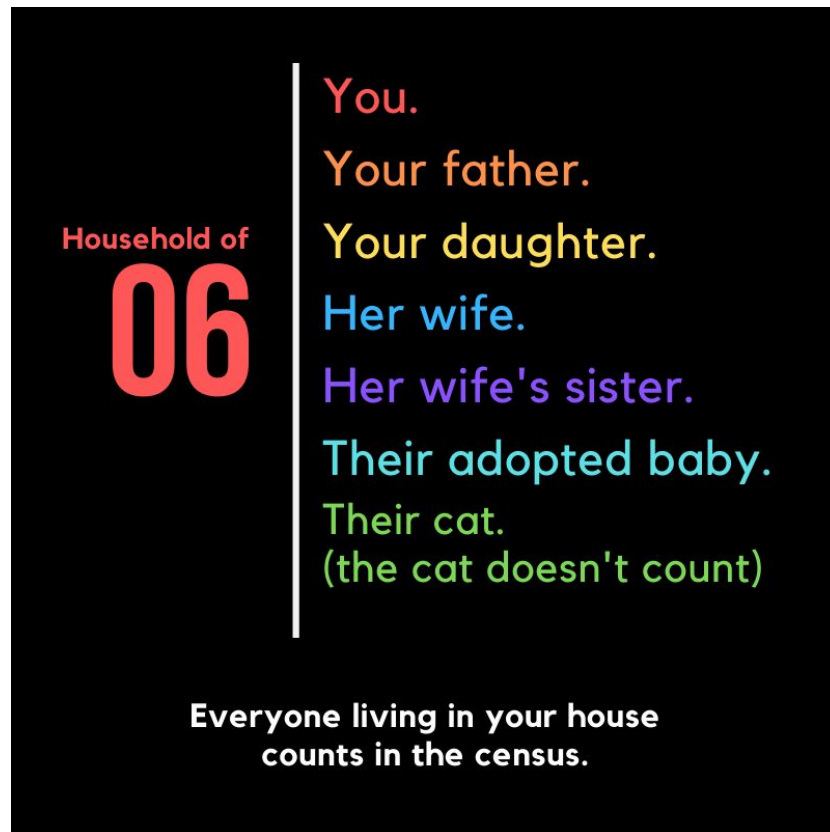
## **Select your hosting platform (i.e. Skype, Zoom)**

Research and decide on your virtual platform. To host an event you'll need to decide on the following:

- What online platform?
- How many guests?
- Virtual breakout rooms?
- Are there any technology barriers for any of your partners?

## PHASE 2:

# START PREPARING FOR THE EVENT



## Spread the word & follow up with attendees

We know they say “build it and they will come,” but we’ve found every successful Create-a-thon, virtual or in-person, requires a whole lot of outreach.

So, with that in mind, make sure you budget time to get out the word. Spend some time researching which networks to invite, so that there’s a balance between creatives and those comfortable making content, with those working closely with the hard-to-count community your event is focused on (*sometimes* those groups are one and the same, but

not always!). Asking your community partners to share the invite will create a more diverse set of

Recruit for skill sets needed, including:

- Design students
- Census experts
- Graphic designers
- Social media influencers
- Strategists and others with communication expertise
- Community advocates or other community members with local knowledge
- Filmmakers
- Hard-to-count community advocates
- Local press or journalists

As for what to say, we've done the heavy lifting for you! Take a look at the [resource guide for templated invite, follow up and confirmation emails](#) to help keep your outreach process running smoothly. The link includes:

- INITIAL INVITATION EMAIL
- 5 DAYS BEFORE: Reminder Email
- 1 DAY BEFORE: Final Details
- 1 DAY AFTER: Follow Up Email

## Prepare your event materials

Here are a few materials you'll need that we're sharing from past events. You can take these, **make a copy**, and customize for your own Create-a-thon.

### **#1: RUN OF SHOW DOCUMENT**

The run of show document is your cheat sheet for you and your team, to figure out who is speaking when, how many minutes you want to allot to each section, etc. Keep in mind - this is designed for the single day agenda, but you can customize it for the multi day or hybrid agendas.

[→ Customize your run of show document](#)

## #2: PRESENTATION

Here's a presentation template we've used for past virtual Create-a-thons. You can use this as a starting point and customize it for your own event.

[→ Grab the Google Doc Slides template here](#)

## #3: BRIEFS / DIGITAL WHITE BOARDS FOR BREAK-OUT GROUPS

If you're able to use break-out group technology as in Zoom, we recommend setting up a "digital whiteboard" to guide the thinking of each group.

Here's a template that we used in our original Virtual Create-a-thon. It'll take some work to customize it.

[→ Grab the break out group brief / digital white board document here](#)

## #4: FOLLOW UP SURVEY

We have a Typeform set-up to collect feedback after the event. Please share this link with your participants. We're happy to report back results from your event.

[→ Prepare to send the form](#)

# Get familiar with Census resources

Want to get smart about Census before your event, or share materials with your attendees ahead of time? Here are some extra resources to consider sending to your participants.

**Extra Resources to Share at your Create-a-thon**

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### Getting familiar with Census 101, and hand-outs to share at your Create-a-thon:

- [Census 101: What you Need to Know Fact Sheet in English](#)
- [Información básica sobre el censo: Lo que usted necesita saber](#)
- [How the 2020 Census will invite everyone to respond](#)
- [Cómo el Censo del 2020 invitará a todos a responder](#)
- [Download and share additional fact sheets](#)

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### Understanding barriers and motivations of different hard-to-count groups:

The Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study (CBAMS) is a nationwide survey of 50,000 households that covers a range of topics related to census participation and completion. Results allow the Census Bureau to understand and compare barriers, attitudes, and motivators across demographic subgroups such as Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and, given sufficient sample size, additional groups like income and education levels.

- [Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study \(CBAMS\)](#)
- [Researching the Attitudes of Households Reporting Young Children \(kids under 5\)](#)

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### Videos to screen at your Create-a-thon:

- [Shape Your Future: The 2020 Census \(U.S. Census Bureau\)](#)
- [The Census is about Power and Money \(Rock the Vote\)](#)

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### Other resources that might come in handy:

- ↳ [Language guides and translations of commonly used terms in the 2020 Census](#)
-

## PHASE 3: HOSTING THE EVENT



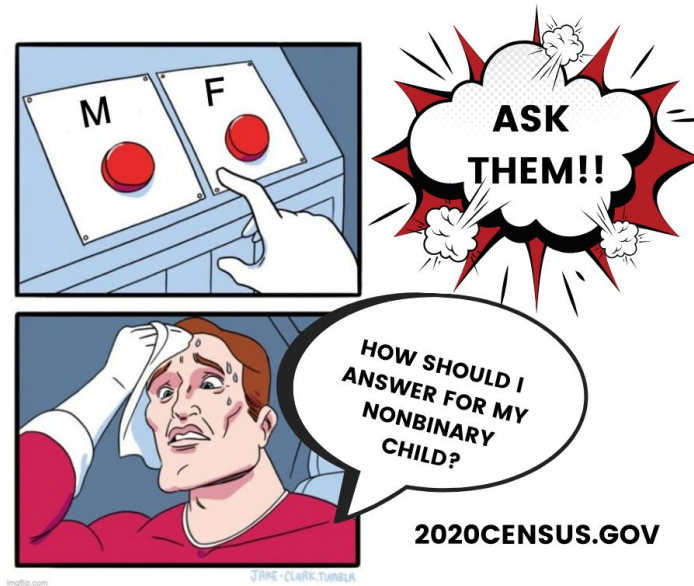
### **Confirm details with attendees**

Send a final confirmation email to your attendees. Take advantage of [our email templates](#) to guide your outreach.

Any questions as you're doing the final stretch prep? Does your facilitator want to do a virtual practice run? Our team is here! Email us at [census.accelerate@census.gov](mailto:census.accelerate@census.gov).



## Get familiar with tools for creating assets



Your day before confirmation is sent. Spend some time familiarizing the tools we suggest participants use in creating their content. [You can find this on slide 31 of the deck template as well.](#)

Find these links at [bitly.url/create-toolbox](https://bitly.url/create-toolbox)

- For a simple-to-use graphic design tool, try [canva.com](https://canva.com) | [spark.adobe.com](https://spark.adobe.com) | [imgflip.com/memegenerator](https://imgflip.com/memegenerator)
- For free-to-use photography, try [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) | [pexels.com](https://pexels.com) | [reshot.com](https://reshot.com)
- For icons, try [thenounproject.com](https://thenounproject.com)
- For image size specs, try [Sprout Social's Social Media Sizes Guide](#)
- Census 2020 logos [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov)

# Go time!

We usually schedule a “dress rehearsal” to run through the virtual Create-a-thon with our team the day before.

Otherwise, go for it! And remember, have fun!

As a reminder, these are the file types all assets need to be created in order to live on [creativesfortheaccount.org](https://creativesfortheaccount.org), so urge your attendees to create files in these formats.

## For static files:

- .jpeg
- .jpg
- .png
- .gif

## For editable files:

- .eps
- .psd
- .ai
- .indd
- .sket



Designed by: Teja Foster from Rock The Vote Virtual Create a thon 2020

## PHASE 4: WRAP UP

Congratulations on completing a successful Virtual Create-a-thon event! Below we've outlined a few next steps for you to share with your participants and event partners:

[First, please be sure to collect feedback and comments from your attendees using the Typeform survey.](#)

Secondly, be sure to upload all newly generated content directly to the Rock The Vote site, [creativesforthevote.org](https://creativesforthevote.org) for attendees to download and share on their own platforms.

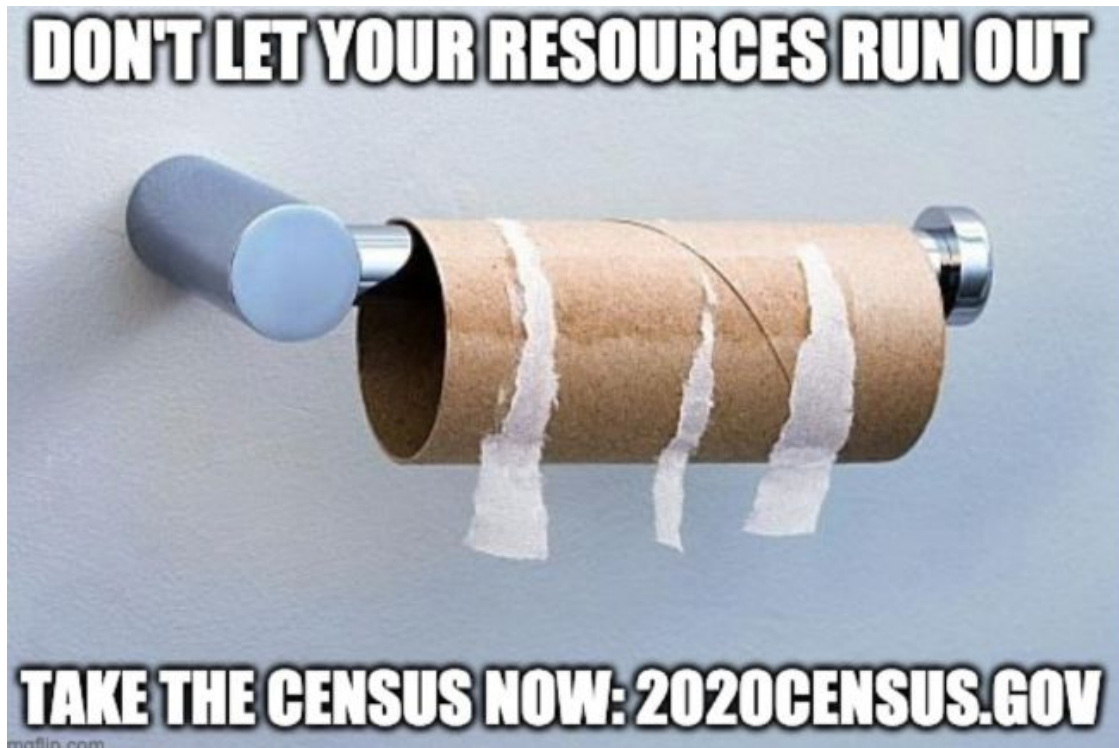
### **Job well done!**

Don't forget to reach out to our team and share more about your events at [census.accelerate@census.gov](mailto:census.accelerate@census.gov). Visit us at [accelerate.census.gov](https://accelerate.census.gov) to learn more.

# APPENDIX

## Resources & Templates

Use our premade templates to quickly start planning and developing materials for your Create-a-thon.



## Template

## Description

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### [Run of Show](#)

A minute-to-minute sequence for running the live event for you and your team.

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### [Starter Deck](#)

Slides for kicking off, executing, and closing out the event. Delete what you don't need and make it your own!

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### [Emails](#)

Example language for email communications around the event.

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### [Persona Worksheet](#)

Participants can use these worksheets to develop a persona, a representation of your target audience.

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### [Facilitator Guide](#)

Event producers can use this to help guide the virtual collaboration process

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