

Ask an Expert: Fact and Fiction about the 2020 U.S. Census

Amanda Christensen

By: Amanda Christensen Utah State University Extension
associate professor, Amanda.christensen@usu.edu,



801-829-3472

It comes around every 10 years, and it's hard to believe it is time to participate in another U.S. Census. Below is information from the Federal Trade Commission, in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, about the facts and fiction on how the 2020 Census process works. It includes the information you will — and won't — be asked for, and red flags to help you spot and report scams.

The Process: In mid-March 2020, the Census Bureau will start mailing out (and, in some areas, hand delivering) invitations to participate in the 2020 Census. You should get yours by April 1. You can respond online, by phone or by mail.

The Census Bureau has an important job: to count every person living in the United States. Starting in May 2020, census takers will start visiting homes that haven't responded to make sure everyone is counted. If you aren't home or can't come to the door, the census taker will come back up to six times. Each time, they'll leave a door hanger with a phone number so you can call to schedule a visit.

The Questions: The census questionnaire asks how many people are in the home at the time you complete the form; their sex, age, race, ethnicity; their relationships to one another; phone number; and whether you own or rent the home. For the full list of questions on the 2020 Census, visit 2020census.gov.

Signs of a Scam: Scammers may pose as census takers to get your personal information — and then use it to commit identity theft and other frauds. But there are ways you can identify official census takers. Census takers must show a photo ID with the U.S. Department of Commerce seal and an expiration date. If you ask, the census taker will give you a supervisor's contact information and/or the census regional office phone number for verification. The Census Bureau will NEVER ask for your full Social Security number, bank account or credit card numbers, money or donations, or anything on behalf of a political party. The 2020 Census will not ask citizenship status.

The Census Bureau may call you as part of their follow-up and quality control efforts. They also might call if you're not home when a census taker stops by or when a personal visit is not convenient. Calls will come from one of the Census Bureau's contact centers or from a field representative. Because it's hard to trust caller ID, visit 2020census.gov to learn how to identify phone numbers you can use to check on any calls you get.

If you suspect fraud, call 800-923-8282 to speak with a local Census Bureau representative. You can also file a report with the FTC at FTC.gov/Complaint. Your reports may help law enforcement agencies launch investigations that could stop imposters and other fraudsters in their tracks.

Make sure you have the latest and most accurate information about the 2020 Census. Visit [2020 Census Rumors](https://2020census.gov) to fact-check and ask questions.

Source: consumer.ftc.gov, 2020census.gov